Plotinus

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Introduction

I. Life and Writings

PLOTINUS TELLS US nothing about his life in his own writings, and all our information about him comes from the biography which his disciple and editor Porphyry wrote as an introduction to the *Enneads*.[1] Fortunately this is a reliable source. Porphyry seems to have taken care to be accurate, and his account of the six years at the end of Plotinus's life when he was with him at Rome is based on close personal knowledge. He is inclined to be gossipy and rambling, and has a well-developed sense of his own importance, and sets out not only to glorify his master but to show himself in the most favourable light and to give a very full explanation of his procedure as editor of Plotinus's writings: but there seems no reason to doubt his accuracy in matters of fact.

Plotinus himself would never say anything about his family or birthplace (see our first extract) and we really do not know to what race or country he belonged, though it has generally been assumed, both in ancient and modern times, that he came from Egypt. (Eunapius says he was from "Lyco," i.e. probably Lycopolis in Upper Egypt, the modern Assiut; but we do not know where Eunapius got this information from or how reliable it is.) And even if we could be sure that he came of a family settled in Upper Egypt, this of course would tell us nothing certain about his race. His name seems to be Latin; the first person we know of who bore it was the Empress Plotina, the

[1] Careful examination by modern scholars seems to show that the information about Plotinus given by Firmicus Maternus, Eunapius, and Suidas has no independent value: anything dependable in it derives from Porphyry. See Schwyzer's article "Plotin" in *Paulys Realenzyklopädie,* Band XXI, col. 475–477. Porphyry's *Life* appears at the beginning of all complete MSS. of the *Enneads* and is printed in the same place in all editions. Extracts from it are given at the beginning of these selections.

wife of Trajan: but again we cannot draw any conclusions from this about his race or social standing. Nor have we any idea what he looked like. Porphyry tells us (ch. 1) that a good portrait of him was painted, in spite of his objections and without his knowledge, in his lifetime, but we have no evidence that any copy of it or sculpture inspired by it exists. It has been tentatively suggested that a very fine portrait of a philosopher on an ancient sarcophagus[2] represents Plotinus, but there are really no very good reasons for the identification. There is, however, one thing we can be certain about, from Plotinus's own writings and everything else we know of him, and that is that he was fully and completely Greek by education and cultural background.

Plotinus was born in A.D. 205 and died in 270. His life, that is, covers one of the most turbulent, insecure, and unhappy periods in the history of the Roman Empire: but the external affairs of his time have left no trace in his writings. Philosophy was for the men of his period both a full-time professional occupation and a religious vocation demanding withdrawal from the world, as we can see from the case of the senator Rogatianus, for whom conversion to philosophy meant renunciation of public office.[3] Plotinus, as we shall see, could play his part admirably in the affairs of this world when he thought it his duty to do so, but what occupied his mind, and fills his writings, was the by now immense and complicated tradition of the Greek philosophical schools, contained in a massive bulk of literature, and his own personal intellectual-religious experience.

Our first fixed date in his life is 232, when he came to Alexandria to study philosophy (it is interesting to note that he took to the study relatively late in life). Here, so he told his pupils later in Rome, he could find no philosophical teacher to satisfy him until someone took him to Ammonius Saccas. We shall say more about the possible effect of this enigmatic person's teaching on Plotinus's

[2] cp. *Jahrbuch des Deutschen archäologischen Instituts,* LI (1936), pp. 104–105.
[3] *Life,* ch. 7.

thought in our next section. He had been brought up a Christian[4] but had abandoned the Christian faith. Among his pupils, besides Plotinus, were the two Origens, the heathen Neo-Platonist who appears several times in Porphyry's *Life* and the great Christian teacher and writer.[5] Plotinus was profoundly impressed by his first hearing of him, and remained in his school for eleven years. There can be no doubt that the teaching of Ammonius was the decisive influence on his mind, and determined the character of his philosophy. At the age of thirty-nine, in 243, he developed a desire to study Persian and Indian philosophy, and joined the Emperor Gordian's expedition to the East. But Gordian was murdered in Mesopotamia early in 244, and Plotinus escaped with some difficulty to Antioch. The important thing about this episode, from the point of view of our understanding of Plotinus's thought, is that he never in fact established any sort of contact with Eastern thinkers; and there is no good evidence, internal or external, to show that he ever acquired any knowledge of Indian philosophy.

After this unsuccessful expedition he came to Rome, in the year 244 at the age of forty, and began to teach philosophy and, after ten years, to write. This was the really productive period of his life and the one which we know best from Porphyry's account. In it Plotinus appears as very much the great Professor; it is in fact the first full-length portrait of a professor in European literature; but he also appears, as our extracts show, as a man of limitless and extremely efficient practical kindliness, a trait not uncommon in great contemplatives. He became a close friend of the Emperor Gallienus and the Empress Salonina, and was probably in as good a position to influence public affairs as any other philosopher in the ancient world. But the reform of the State was now no

[4] Porphyry in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI. 19. 7.

[5] The ancient evidence seems to me to make it absolutely clear that these were two different people; cp. Schwyzer, art. cit., col. 480, for some (not to me the strongest) evidence against identifying them. Cadiou, in *La Jeunesse d'Origène* (Paris, 1935), is the main upholder of their identity.

longer, as it had been in the days of Plato and Aristotle, a prime concern of the philosopher, and his writings show no signs of political activity or interest. He preached and practised withdrawal from the affairs of the world except in so far as his duty to his fellow men forced him to take part in them. We do know, however, from Porphyry[6] that he nearly persuaded the Emperor to found a city of philosophers in Campania, to be called Platonopolis and governed according to Plato's *Laws*: and this was perhaps not quite the ridiculous piece of bookish and unpractical archaism that it appears at first sight. The city was still in the 3rd century the normal unit of civilized living, and it might well have seemed to Gallienus as well as to Plotinus that a philosophically ordered city would serve a useful purpose as a centre of the Hellenic cultural revival which the Emperor had very much at heart, a strong-point of resistance against the barbarization of the Empire and the anti-Hellenic spiritual forces of Gnosticism and Christianity. The scheme came to nothing owing to opposition at court, and perhaps was not very likely to have been successful anyhow: but we need not assume that the results would have been as grotesque as they apear in David Garnett's brilliantly amusing satire.

In 269 the illness from which Plotinus died became so much worse that he left Rome for the country estate of his friend Zethus in Campania; there he died in the first half of 270. The illness has been identified as a form of leprosy: how he bore it we can imagine from reading what he has to say about suffering and death in his last nine treatises, written in the last two years of his life. They are full of that noble courage, that clear-sighted refusal to regard pain and death as great evils even when suffering severe pain and very near to death, which all the great ancient philosophies, Platonist, Stoic, and Epicurean alike, could inspire in their best adherents.

Plotinus only began to write in about 254, after ten years in Rome, at the age of fifty. His writings thus all belong to the last sixteen years of his life, and we should not

[6] *Life*, ch. 12.

expect to find, and do not in fact find,[7] any real development of thought in them: they represent a mature and fully formed philosophy. But they do not present it systematically. Plotinus wrote his treatises to deal with particular points as they arose in the discussions of his school, and during his lifetime they circulated only among its members. In dealing with the particular points, of course, the great principles of his philosophy are always coming in, and we are very conscious that there is a fully worked-out system of thought in the background: but it is presented to us, not step by step in an orderly exposition, but by a perpetual handling and rehandling of the great central problems, always from slightly different points of view and with reference to different types of objections and queries. In editing this mass of detached treatises Porphyry disregarded their chronological order, which, however, he left on record in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of the *Life*,[8] with some appended remarks designed to show that Plotinus only did his best work while he, Porphyry, was with him, which seem to spring from his own self-importance rather than any objective judgment of the merits of the treatises and are not generally taken seriously by modern students of Plotinus. He divided the treatises into three great groups, more or less according to subject-matter, one containing the treatises on the Categories and those of which the principal subject was the One (the Sixth *Ennead*), one containing the treatises dealing chiefly with Soul and *Nous* (the Fourth and Fifth *Enneads*), and one containing all the other treatises (the First, Second, and Third *Enneads*). By some very vigorous editing he succeeded in tidying these groups into six *Enneads* or sets of nine treatises, thereby producing that symmetry of sacred number in which he, like others of his age, delighted. In order to do this he had to divide a number of long treatises into several parts (III. 2–3, IV. 3–5, VI. 1–3, VI. 4–5) and

[7] F. Heinemann, in his book *Plotin* (Leipzig, 1921), did attempt to trace such a development, but his conclusions have been generally rejected by Plotinian scholars.

[8] The numbers of the treatises in this chronological order will be found in the table at the end of this *Introduction*, p. 40.

even to break one up altogether and put the parts into different *Enneads* (III. 8, V. 8, V. 5, II. 9 were written by Plotinus as a single treatise); and it is possible, though not certain, that it was he who collected the short notes on various subjects which make up III. 9 into a single treatise to make up his number. But though he was so high-handed in the arrangement of his material he seems to have treated the text of Plotinus with great respect, and to have done no more than correct his master's somewhat erratic spelling.[9] We can be reasonably sure that in the *Enneads* we are reading Plotinus, however oddly arranged, and not Porphyry.

II. The Philosophical and Religious Background of the *Enneads*

The immediate philosophical background of Plotinus's thought is of course the teaching of the Platonic school. Antiochus of Ascalon, who died about 68 B.C. and whose lectures Cicero heard at Athens, had revived positive philosophical teaching in Plato's school, the Academy, after its sceptical and negative period. His own philosophy seems to have been a rather unsatisfactory sort of Stoic-Platonic eclecticism. But from this eclecticism there developed in the first two centuries A.D., with considerable influence from the revived studies of the mature works of Aristotle and the contemporary revival of Pythagoreanism, a new version of Platonism which in some ways anticipates Plotinus and has been of the very greatest importance for the later development of traditional European philosophy. The representatives of this Middle Platonism about whom we know anything are a very variegated collection. The best known is Plutarch, a thoroughly cultured and well-read man with wide interests and a very attractive personality, but not a profound or original thinker. Then there are serious but not very inspiring professional philosophers like Albinus, the sort of people who must have contributed most to the building up of Middle Plato-

[9] See the discussion in *Plotini Opera* I, ed. P. Henry and H. R. Schwyzer, *Praefatio*, pp. ix–x.

nism: and a fringe of third-rate transcendentalist speechifiers like Apuleius and Maximus of Tyre, who represent the popular pseudo-philosophy of the period in its most repectable form: for ideas derived from this new form of Platonism penetrated to still lower intellectual levels, into the secret revelations of Gnostics and Hermetists and right down to the magicians and alchemists. At the very beginning of the Christian era we find a remarkable attempt to interpret the Jewish Scriptures with the help of a not very consistent or coherent understanding of Greek philosophy, in which ideas of a Middle Platonist type predominate, in the works of Philo of Alexandria. The thought of the Neo-Pythagoreans, in so far as they were really philosophers and not just theosophists and magicians, is not easy to distinguish from that of the Platonists, and it seems best to regard both as forming part of a single group. Numenius, one of the most important of the immediate forerunners of Plotinus, can be called a Neo-Pythagorean, though it seems better to regard him as a Pythagoreanizing Platonist.

For our present purposes it will be enough to give a summary account of the main tendencies and characteristics of this philosophical movement without going into differences between individuals. Like the philosophy of Plotinus himself it is, as far as it is serious, a learned and bookish philosophy. Commentary on the works of Plato and Aristotle is beginning to become an important part of philosophical activity. Doxography, too, the collection and systematic arrangement of the opinions of the leading thinkers of all schools on the principal philosophical topics, plays a very important part in the philosophical development of the period. This learned activity brought with it a certain amount of eclecticism. The Platonists remained Platonists and not Aristotelians or Stoics; but they did sometimes study the opinions of thinkers of other schools with respect and in the hope of learning something from them. So we find in Middle Platonism a certain amount of Stoic influence and a much more important (at least from the point of view of the development of Neo-Platonism) admixture of Aristotelianism.

The first principle of reality for the Middle Platonists is a transcendent Mind or God. The transcendence of this God is often very strongly stressed: the "negative theology," the description of God by saying what He is not rather than what He is, so characteristic of Plotinus and traditional theology ever since, begins to appear: and in some Neo-Pythagoreans we find anticipations of Plotinus's doctrine of the One.[10] This supreme Divine Mind is the place of the Platonic Forms or Ideas. Albinus speaks of them as "thoughts of God." This is a new development whose importance for the history of philosophy and theology need hardly be stressed. It ensured for the Platonic Ideas the place in traditional Christian thinking which they have never lost. Plotinus's own doctrine is, as we shall see, rather different from but clearly dependent on the Middle Platonist. Below the supreme Mind in the Middle Platonists there is sometimes to be found a Second Mind or God, with a world-moving or world-ordering function, and below that again the Soul of the World. In the more popular versions of Middle Platonism the *daemones,* being intermediary between gods and men who appear in Greek belief as early as Hesiod, play an important part. The idea of a hierarchy of spiritual powers between the Supreme God and our world is always apparent. About matter and the origin of Evil the Middle Platonists disagreed; but they inclined to a dualist solution of the problem of evil, whether they saw its origin in an evil soul (Plutarch) or in matter itself (Numenius).

This very summary and sketchy account should be enough to show that the philosophy of Plotinus is in all essentials a development (though sometimes a very bold and original one) of the Middle Platonist school tradition. But there is another philosophical influence on his thought which must not be neglected. Plotinus devotes a great deal

[10] For a fuller discussion of Middle Platonist theology and its origins, cp. the first two chapters of my book *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1940): though much of what I say there about Plato needs drastic revision in the light of recent studies of the last phases of his thought.

of time and energy in his writings to dealing faithfully with Stoicism, and in particular with the curious Stoic way of thinking of spiritual being in terms of body. It was probably the struggle to free his own mind and the minds of his pupils from the very pervasive influence of the Stoic conception of God and the soul as a sort of gas that led Plotinus to the very clear understanding of the difference between spiritual and material being which is such a valuable feature of his thought. But he does none the less show evidence of the influence of Stoicism, to a greater degree than his Middle Platonist predecessors and on some very important aspects of his thought. One of the things which must strike any reader of Plotinus very forcibly, especially if he comes to him from Plato, is his emphasis on life. Plato seems to have imagined the spiritual world as a place of static, regular mathematical pattern and geometrical intelligence ordering all things on that pattern. Plotinus's spiritual world is a place "boiling with life," where infinite power wells up and surges eternally in a carefree spontaneity without plan or need into a splendid superabundance of living forms. And both spiritual and material worlds are for him in their very different ways organisms, unities-in-diversity held together in a living whole by a single life. The liberation from Stoic corporeal ways of thinking enables Plotinus to give his own original developments to this sense of life. But it is impossible not to see that it owes a very great deal to the dynamic vitalism of the Stoics, who saw the universe as a single living organism held together, enlivened, and ensouled by the Divine Fire which was the fullness both of life and intelligence.

Plotinus of course, like his Platonist predecessors, considered his philosophy not, as modern historians of philosophy consider it, as a philosophy inspired by Plato and historically derived from Plato, but with a great many new and distinctive features which are certainly not to be found in Plato's own thought, but simply as an exposition of Plato's own system. It is quite clear from his writings that he thought that Plato had a systematic philosophy, that the answers to all important philosophical questions were to be found in the Dialogues if only they were interpreted

rightly, and that the duty of a Platonist philosopher was simply to find and proclaim the right interpretations. But in fact the greatest difference between Plato and the Middle Platonist and Neo-Platonist philosophers is just that Plato is not a systematic thinker. It does not seem possible to maintain that there lies behind even the later Dialogues the sort of fully worked-out system of thought which lies behind the *Enneads*. Plato's mind did not work like that. And we find that Plotinus arrives at his conception of Plato's system by taking a rather limited number of passages from the later Dialogues out of their contexts, bringing them, sometimes with a good deal of forcing, into relation with each other, and interpreting them often in a very arbitrary way without reference to the sequence of thought in the dialogue in which they occur. This procedure and many of the interpretations (notably that of the second part of the *Parmenides*) seem to have been traditional in the Platonic school.[11] This complete difference in kind between the two philosophies makes any detailed comparison between the system of Plato and the system of Plotinus impossible, because any such comparison must begin by making the untrue assumption that there is a system of Plato. But this does not of course mean that the two have nothing to do with each other, or that the observation of the similarities and differences between the minds of the two great philosophers is not of the most fascinating interest. Only a few brief indications, which interested readers can pursue further for themselves, can be given here, for the topic is an enormous one. We can say that Plotinus is genuinely in accord with Plato in his sharp division of reality into an eternal, spiritual or intelligible, and a temporal, material and sensible world, with the scheme of values and the view of human life which this division implies; and also in his conviction that the material world of the senses is good and ordered by divine intelligence and has its own sort of reality and importance in the scheme of things, and that though it is not the true home of the soul, yet the soul has its work to

[11] For a full discussion of the way in which Plotinus interprets Plato, see Schwyzer, art. cit., col. 550–553.

do in it. His view of the nature and destiny of the human soul is therefore in essence genuinely Platonic, except (and it is an important exception) in his doctrine of the final mystical union. His doctrine of a transcendent Principle of the World of Ideas and his sharp distinction between *Nous* and Soul, though they are not Platonic in their developed form, do seem to be genuine developments of ideas which are already to be found in Plato. But the placing of the Ideas in the Divine Mind, the emphasis on life and the organic view of reality, the doctrine that there are Ideas of individuals, and the doctrine of the Divine Infinity, all seem to belong to ways of thinking quite different from Plato's and to have come to Plotinus from other sources, and their appearance in his thought means a radical transformation of Platonism.

Plotinus's attitude to Aristotle, from whose philosophy, especially his metaphysics and psychology, he derives very much, is a good deal more independent and critical than his attitude to Plato. There was a strongly anti-Aristotelian group among the Middle Platonists, and Plotinus is obviously aware of, and sometimes accepts, their views. He knows that Aristotle often differs from Plato, and where he differs he is quite sure that he is wrong. On the whole, as a result of this greater detachment, we can say that he has a much more accurate understanding of Aristotle's real thought than he has of Plato's. There were historical reasons for this, too. The Peripatetic writers, the great commentator Alexander and others, who were read in his school, kept much closer to the real thought of Aristotle than the Middle Platonists did to that of Plato. Aristotelianism, after the publication of the great edition of Aristotle's works by Andronicus in the 1st century B.C. and until its final absorption by Neo-Platonism, was a matter of close commentary on the works of the master without much development of his thought, not a growing and changing philosophy like Platonism: a difference which is at least in part due to the difference between the clear-cut systematic philosophy of Aristotle and the thoroughly unsystematic and infinitely suggestive thought of Plato, which seems to stimulate his readers in every generation to find

or make Platonic systems of their own (which they generally attribute to Plato himself).

The most important, but unfortunately probably unanswerable, question to ask about Plotinus's philosophical background is, What was the content of the teaching of Ammonius Saccas, the philosopher who undoubtedly influenced him more than any other ancient or contemporary thinker? We have very little information about the teaching of Ammonius,[12] who wrote nothing, and it is by no means certain how far one of the passages on which any attempt to reconstruct parts of his thought must be based (the quotation from Hierocles) really refers to him at all. He seems to have taught, like other Middle Platonists, that Plato and Aristotle were in fundamenal agreement. Nemesius attributes to him views about the nature of the soul and its relationship to the body which correspond exactly to the teaching of Plotinus. And it is possible that he taught the doctrine which we find in Hierocles of a single supreme God who made the universe, a twofold hierarchically ordered unity of intelligible and sensible worlds, out of nothing. If this is really so, it would mean, first that Ammonius's thought was still powerfully influenced by his Christian upbringing, in spite of his abandonment of Christianity, for creation out of no pre-existing matter is Judaeo-Christian, not Greek philosophical doctrine. This would help to account for the striking parallels between Plotinus's language and Christian ways of speaking about God which have impressed his Christian readers since St. Augustine. It would also mean that the distinction between the One and *Nous,* which is one of the most important things in the philosophy of Plotinus, did not go back to Ammonius but was original (there is some evidence that the pagan Origen, another pupil of Ammonius, did not believe in it). But on the whole it is perhaps safer

[12] There are three passages which refer to his teaching, two in Nemesius, *On The Nature of Man,* 2. 29 and 3. 56, and one from the 5th-century Platonist Hierocles, quoted by Photius, *Bibliotheca,* cod. 251, p. 461*a,* 31 ff. and in a rather fuller form cod. 214, p. 172*a,* 3 ff. For a discussion of this evidence see Schwyzer, art. cit., col. 477–481.

to say simply that we know almost nothing about the teaching of Ammonius, and therefore cannot be sure how far Plotinus simply reproduced or developed, or departed from, the teaching of his master.[13]

The philosophy of Plotinus is, more even than other philosophies of the first centuries of the Christian era, not only a philosophy but a religion, a way for the mind to ascend to God. It is therefore worth while saying something about its relation to the non-philosophical religions of the time, those at least which aroused any genuine personal devotion. The official public cults meant little to Plotinus, though he makes, like other late Greek philosophers, a good deal of use of allegorical interpretations of the traditional myths for his own purposes. The mystery-religions cannot have contributed any ideas to his religious thought because they had no ideas to contribute. They were religions of cult and emotion, and, in so far as their more thoughtful devotees had anything approaching a theology, it was derived from the more easily understandable forms of contemporary philosophy and not from any sort of independent doctrinal tradition. All that Plotinus took from them was a certain amount of decorative symbolism (the language of light applied to spiritual being which plays so great a part in the *Enneads* does not derive specifically from mystery-rituals of illumination. Light-symbolism and the belief in a close connexion between light and divinity is a universal feature of all the religions and religious philosophies of the period). There is no evidence that Plotinus had any direct contact with orthodox Christianity, though Porphyry knew a good deal about it and attacked it vigorously. We can assume that Plotinus knew little about it, and that what he knew he disliked. Any direct and consciously recognized influence of Jewish or Christian ideas on his mind can be ruled out, and though we cannot absolutely exclude the possibility of indirect influence, perhaps through Ammonius or other contacts at Alexandria, we certainly cannot prove that such influence

[13] Longinus, who had heard Ammonius, certainly considered Plotinus to be an original thinker, cp. the long quotation in Porphyry, *Life,* ch. 20.

existed. And the fact that orthodox Christians, from St. Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers to our own times, have been able to find a very great deal in Plotinus that has been of value to them should not prevent us from realizing that his system as it stands is in many ways incompatible with Christianity and belongs to a different type of religious thought.

Plotinus has left us in no doubt about his own opinions on the strange and powerful contemporary religious movement which we know as Gnosticism. He attacks it vigorously in the ninth treatise of the Second Ennead as untraditional, departing from the true teaching of Plato, irrational and inconsistent, insanely arrogant, and immoral in its tendencies. The neurotic Gnostic search for a secret sacred knowledge, a *gnosis,* the possession of which would automatically bring salvation, which led to the production and circulation of a mass of fantastic compilations claiming to be divine revelations and repositories of ancient Oriental wisdom, was utterly repugnant to his intelligent Hellenic conservatism, for which the philosophy of Plato was manifestly reasonable and taught the truth and showed the way to God to those who were able and willing to follow it by the exercise of intelligence and virtue.[14] And his attitude to the visible universe was utterly opposed to that of the Gnostics. For them it was an evil prison, vitiated in its very nature, produced as the result of the fall of a spiritual power, with which man (or at least the Gnostic) who had come into it from a higher world as a result of that fall had absolutely nothing in common, which he utterly rejected and sought to escape from by means of the *gnosis.* For Plotinus, in this entirely true to Plato's doctrine, the visible universe was good, an essenial part of the nature of things, not the result of any fall or error but of the spontaneous expansion of the divine goodness to fill all possible being, made by divine intelligence as the best possible material image of the spiritual universe. Man was akin to and should venerate as nobler than himself the di-

[14] cp. Porphyry, *Life,* ch. 16, for the campaign of Plotinus and his disciples to expose the pseudonymous revelations of the Gnostics.

vine souls which moved the stars (in Gnostic belief evil or inferior, hostile powers) and the great Soul of the World. He certainly belonged by right to the spiritual world and should seek to return there and transcend the material even while in the body: but he should do it without resentment or impatience or denial of the goodness of the visible world and his own real duties there. On the other hand, Plotinus's doctrine of matter ("prime" matter, absolute formlessness, as distinct from body, which is formed matter and good in so far as formed) as "darkness" and the principle of evil is in language and thought very like Gnosticism. And there are a good many other similarities of language and thought which a reading either of the Hermetic treatises, which represent a Gnosticism unaffected by Christianity, or of the accounts of the teaching of the Christianized Gnostics,[15] will show. The themes, for instance, of the transcendence and incomprehensibility of the Supreme Being Who is higher than Mind, and of the unity-in-diversity of the spiritual world recur in the Gnostic writings (many of which are earlier than, or contemporary with, Plotinus). These similarities, however, are not to be accounted for by supposing that Plotinus borrowed from the Gnostics. Ideas of this sort were "in the air" and might appear in very different contexts and with endless adaptations and modifications in the thought of thinkers of very different schools.

We may sum up the general philosophical and religious situation in the age of Plotinus in the words of G. Quispel,[16] "Late antiquity appears to our mind's eye as a land of three rivers, traversed by canals and with bridges which make traffic possible; but all the same three great streams appear distinctly, Gnosis, Neo-Platonism, and Christianity." There are innumerable interconnexions, but the three streams remain distinct, springing from different sources and flowing in different directions. And even when Christianity, after drawing into its stream a great deal of water from the other two rivers, flows on by itself, the result is

[15] There are some very striking ones in St. Irenaeus's account of the teaching of Valentinus, *Adv. Haer*, I. 1. 1–I. 8. 4.
[16] *Gnosis als Welt-Religion*, ch. 3, p. 26.

not a mere syncretism or fusion. Christianity assimilates what it takes from the other two but remains itself.

III. The Thought of Plotinus

(i)

The philosophy of Plotinus is an account of an ordered structure of living reality, which proceeds eternally from its transcendent First Principle, the One or Good, and descends in an unbroken succession of stages from the Divine Intellect and the Forms therein through Soul with its various levels of experience and activity to the last and lowest realities, the forms of bodies: and it is also a showing of the way by which the soul of man which belongs to, can experience and be active on every level of being, is able, if it will, to ascend by a progressive purification and simplification to that union with the Good which alone can satisfy it. There are two movements in Plotinus's universe, one of outgoing from unity to an ever-increasing multiplicity and the other of return to unity and unification: and, related to his conception of these two movements but not entirely corresponding to them, there is a duality and tension in his own thought. On one side there is the attempt to give a completely objective and accurate account of the whole of reality, based on metaphysical reflection, with plenty of hard thinking and argument, and owing a good deal to preceding philosophies, above all of course to the Platonic school tradition: and on the other there is the faithful transcription of his own interior spiritual experience of ascent to and union with the One.[17] If we are to arrive at a true appreciation of Plotinus's thought we must not separate the two sides too sharply. It is, of course, when he speaks of the return to unity, the ascent of the soul to the One, that he draws most on his own experience; and when he is describing the eternal pat-

[17] These two aspects of Plotinus's thought are labelled by modern German-speaking scholars "gegenständlich" and "aktuell," terms first used in this connexion by P. O. Kristeller in *Der Begriff der Seele in der Ethik des Plotins* (1929).

tern of reality as it spreads out in increasing multiplicity on its successive levels in the movement of descent his thought takes on more the character of objective metaphysical reflection, and he argues more and appeals less to experience; it is on this side of his thought, too, that the influence of the school tradition is most marked. But it is quite impossible to separate his metaphysics neatly from his mysticism. His whole description of the nature of reality is coloured and brought to life by his own spiritual experience: and his account of that experience, of the ascent of the soul and the mystical union, is kept firmly in accordance with the structure of his metaphysics. Of course the three great Hypostases, the One, *Nous* or the Divine Intellect, and Soul look rather difficult when seen from different points of view. And Plotinus does not, any more than any other great philosopher, attain complete coherence and consistency in his thought. To many questions he gives answers which vary, though always within well-defined limits, according to the point of view. There is a notable fluctuation in his thought about the precise degree of goodness or badness to be attributed to the body, and more generally in the evaluation of the descent into multiplicity, which appears both as a good and necessary self-expansion and as evil and a fall due to self-will and self-assertion. This fluctuation may perhaps be regarded to some extent as due to a tension between the metaphysical and mystical sides of his thought, though it also derives, as Plotinus was very well aware, from a similar tension in the thought of Plato: and in his effort to present Plato's thought as perfectly reasonable and consistent he tries hard, if not altogether successfully, to resolve it.[18] And there are other fluctuations and tensions besides this major one. There are elements in his experience which do not fit into his system, elements in the tradition he inherited which are not fully assimilated, and lines of thought suggested which if they had been followed up might have led to a radical revision of his philosophy. But his thought cannot be simply resolved into a mere

[18] cp. IV. 8. 5 (F (*c*), p. 123), in these selections.

jumble of conflicting elements. He is at once metaphysician and mystic, a hard and honest thinker who enjoyed intense spiritual experience and could describe it in the language of a great poet, an ascetic who affirmed the goodness of the world of the senses, a traditionalist who could think for himself and encouraged free discussion in others.

(ii)

Plotinus insists repeatedly that the transcendent First Principle which he recognizes, the One or Good, is beyond the reach of human thought or language; and, though he does in fact say a great deal about It, it is very difficult to summarize what he says in any other language but his own without giving an impression of his teaching which is in some ways inadequate and misleading. There are, however, a few things that can be said which may perhaps be helpful to an understanding of the passages translated in these selections. First of all there is an interesting peculiarity about the language which he uses. The names which he normally employs for the First Principle, the One and the Good, *to hen* and *to agathon,* are both neuter in Greek. But even in passages where these neuter terms are used Plotinus frequently passes over, in a way which he apparently found quite natural, from neuter to masculine pronouns and adjectives.[19] This usage I have done my best, for the sake of accuracy, to preserve in the translation, in spite of the oddity of the effect in English. And in view of it I shall feel myself free in the rest of what I have to say here about the One to use the masculine pronoun, which is more natural in talking about a Principle Who corresponds more closely than anything else in Greek philosophy to what we mean by God. (Plotinus himself very rarely uses the word *theos* in speaking of the One; but he does do so occasionally, and there is no reason to suppose that he found it any more inappropriate and undesirable than any other positive term. In any case, of course, the pagan and Judaeo-Christian meanings of *theos* or *deus* are very different. Plotinus also sometimes calls the One

[19] cp. Schwyzer, art. cit., col. 515 Schwyzer says well "die Vorstellung *theos* noch mitschwingt."

the Father, but without any Christian implications.) The important point which drawing attention to this peculiarity of language may help to make clear (it is not by itself sufficient to establish it) is that the One, for all the extreme negativity—partly inherited—of the language which Plotinus sometimes uses about Him is not, as people sometimes suggest, conceived as a mere negation, an ultimate Void, a great Blank behind the universe in attaining to which the human personality disintegrates into conscious nothingness. He is a very positive Reality, of infinite power and content and superabundant excellence. The language of negation as Plotinus uses it is designed either to stress the inadequacy of all our ways of thinking and speaking about Him or to make clear the implications of saying that He is absolutely One and Infinite and the Source of all defined and limited realities. Building upon a famous remark of Plato's in the *Republic*[20] Plotinus insists repeatedly that the Good is "beyond being," that He cannot properly be even said to exist—surely the extreme of negation. But it is perfectly clear from all that Plotinus says about Him, in the very passages where His existence is denied, that He is existent in some sense, and the supreme Existent. What Plotinus is saying is that the unity of the Good is so absolute, He is so completely One, Single and Simple, that no predicates at all can be applied to Him, not even that of existence; and that as the Source of being to all things He is not a thing Himself. For Plotinus, who is true here to Plato's thought, "being" is always "being something," some one particular defined and limited thing, or the totality of such things,[21] and the One is not a thing, nor yet the sum of particular realities, i.e. the totality of being in the Plotinian sense (we shall see that the whole of real being, Absolute Being, containing all definite realities in their archetypal form, is *Nous,* the Second Hypostasis). Again, Plotinus insists that the One does not think, because thought for him always implies a certain duality, a distinction of thought and object of thought, and it is this that he is concerned to exclude in speaking of the One,

20 VI. 509*b*.
21 V. 5. 6 (C, p. 56): cp. my note on this passage (C, 4, p. 151).

and to relegate, again, to the second level of reality, that of *Nous*. But he is so anxious to make clear that this does not mean that the life of the One is mere unconsciousness, to show that He is more, not less, than Mind at the highest level at which we can conceive it, that he attributes to the One a "super-intellection," [22] a simple self-intuition,[23] an immediate self-consciousness[24] higher than the thought of *Nous*. And when he calls the One "formless" he does so because He is Infinite, without limits, and because, precisely as One (here Plotinus follows the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition very closely) He is the Principle of form, of number, measure, order, and limit; and a source or principle for Plotinus is always other and more than that which it produces.

Plotinus by his use of negative language stresses the transcendence of the One to an extreme degree. But he is very careful to exclude all ideas of a quasi-spatial sort about this transcendence. The One is not a God "outside" the world (an idea very fashionable in the early centuries of our era, as in many later periods). Nor is He remote from us, but intimately present in the centre of our souls; or rather we are in Him, for Plotinus prefers to speak of the lower as in the higher rather than the other way round; body is in soul and soul in *Nous* and *Nous* in the One (he is quite aware that, whichever way we put it, we are using an inadequate spatial metaphor). The hierarchical order of levels of being does not imply the remoteness of the One, because they are not spatially separate or cut off from each other; all are present together everywhere. And just because the One is not any particular thing He is present to all things according to their capacity to receive Him.

From the One proceeds the first great derived reality, *Nous*, the Divine Mind which is also the World of Forms or Ideas, and so the totality of true being in the Platonic sense. Its procession from the One is necessary and eternal, as in their turn are the procession of Soul from *Nous* and the forming and ordering of the material universe by Soul.

[22] VI. 8. 16 (C, p. 60).
[23] VI. 7. 38–39 (C, p. 59).
[24] V. 4. 2 (C, p. 59).

In the thought of Plotinus, as in Greek philosophical thought (except Epicurean) in general, the universe as a whole in all its levels, spiritual and material, is eternal and it is impossible to conceive of any part of it not existing or existing otherwise than as it is. The way in which *Nous* proceeds from the One and Soul in its turn from *Nous* is rather loosely and inadequately described as "emanation." The background of Plotinus's thought at this point is certainly a late Stoic doctrine of the emanation of intellect from a divinity conceived as material light or fire, and his favourite metaphor to describe the process is that of the radiation of light or heat from sun or fire (he also uses others of the same sort, the diffusion of cold from snow or perfume from something scented). But he is not content merely to use this traditional analogy and leave it at that, to allow the generation of spiritual beings to be thought of in terms of a materialistically conceived automatism. *Nous* proceeds from the One (and Soul from *Nous*) without in any way affecting its Source. There is no activity on the part of the One, still less any willing or planning or choice (planning and choice are excluded by Plotinus even on a much lower level, when he comes to consider the forming and ruling of the material universe by Soul). There is simply a giving-out which leaves the Source unchanged and undiminished. But though this giving-out is necessary, in the sense that it cannot be conceived as not happening or as happening otherwise, it is also entirely spontaneous: there is no room for any sort of binding or constraint, internal or external, in Plotinus's thought about the One. The reason for the procession of all things from the One is, Plotinus says, simply that everything which is perfect produces something else. Perfection is necessarily productive and creative. Here his thought is certainly influenced by Plato's rejection of the old Greek doctrine of divine envy in the *Timaeus*.[25] But what is stated by Plato as a necessary consequence of supreme moral goodness becomes in Plotinus a law of all being. Here we touch an element of his thought which is of great importance, the

[25] 29*e*.: cp. V. 4. 1 (C, p. 63).

emphasis on life, on the dynamic, vital character of spiritual being. Perfection for him is not merely static. It is a fullness of living and productive power. The One for him is Life and Power, an infinite spring of power, an unbounded life, and therefore necessarily productive. And as it is one of the axioms which Plotinus assumes without discussion that the product must always be less than, inferior to the producer, what the One produces must be that which is next to Him in excellence, namely *Nous*.

Plotinus, when he gives a more precise account of how *Nous* proceeds from the One, introduces a psychological element into the process which goes beyond his light-metaphor. He distinguishes two "moments" in this timeless generation; the first in which *Nous* is radiated as an unformed potentiality and the second in which it turns back to content and becomes the totality of real existence. Here we meet another of the great principles of the philosophy of Plotinus; that all derived beings depend for their existence, their activity, and their power to produce in their turn, on their contemplation of their source. Contemplation always precedes and generates activity and production.[26]

Plotinus's conception of *Nous* is, as the selections in Section D will show, an extremely rich and complex one. It is because of this complexity and richness of content, which makes the use of any single English word for it inadequate and misleading, that I have, in accordance with the principles of this series, kept the transliterated Greek word in my translation where it refers to the Second Hypostasis and does not simply mean "intellect" in general. The only other Greek word which I have found it necessary to keep is *logos* in its special Neo-Platonic sense of "a formative force proceeding from a higher principle which expresses and represents that principle on a lower plane of being." Thus *Nous* is a *logos* of the One and Soul of *Nous*.[27] It is an important term because it expresses the unity and continuity of the different levels of being in Plotinus's system.

[26] cp. III. 8, 4 and 5 (E (*b*), pp. 94–95).
[27] V. 1. 6 (D (*a*), p. 65).

Nous is for Plotinus both thought and object of thought, both the Divine Intellect and the Platonic World of Forms, the totality of real beings. This unity of thought and Forms in a single reality is, to judge from the opposition which it aroused from Porphyry on his first entrance into the school and, apparently, from Longinus,[28] one of the most original features of Plotinus's thought. The Middle Platonists had already taught that the Forms were the "thoughts of God" (though the opposition to Plotinus suggests that this doctrine was not universally accepted in the school), but Plotinus goes a good deal beyond this in his assertion of the absolute co-equality and unity-in-diversity of thought, life, and being. The result is a complete transformation of the Platonic World of Forms. It is no longer a structure, logically or mathematically conceived, of static universal norms, but an organic living community of interpenetrating beings which are at once Forms and intelligences, all "awake and alive," in which every part thinks and therefore in a real sense *is* the whole; so that the relationship of whole and part in this spiritual world is quite different from that in the material world, and involves no sort of separation or exclusion. This unity-in-diversity is the most perfect image possible on the level of being (in the Platonic sense of formed, defined "thisness") of the absolute Unity of the One, Whom *Nous* in its ordinary contemplation cannot apprehend as He is in His absolute simplicity; so it represents His Infinity as best it can in the plurality of Forms. *Nous* itself is infinite in power and immeasurable, because it has no extension and there is no external standard by which it could be measured, but finite because it is a complete whole composed of an actually existing number (all that can possibly exist) of Forms, which are themselves definite, limited realities.

Looked at from the point of view of our own human nature and experience, *Nous* is the level of intuitive thought, a thought which grasps its object immediately and is always perfectly united with it, and does not have to seek it outside itself by discursive reasoning: and we at our highest are *Nous*, or Soul perfectly formed to the like-

[28] *Life*, ch. 18, 20.

ness of *Nous* (this is a point on which there is some variation in Plotinus's thought). Plotinus in some passages at least admits the existence of Forms of individuals, and this enables him to give our particular personalities their place in the world of *Nous*, with the eternal value and status which this implies. And this means that in that world, where the laws of space and time do not apply and the part is the whole, we are Being and the All. This is the explanation of a number of so-called pantheistic passages in Plotinus.[29] In order to understand them correctly we must remember (i) that they refer to *Nous* (Being or the All) not to the One; (ii) that to become *Nous* does not involve the destruction or absorption of the particular individual personality but its return to its perfect archetypal reality, distinguished in unity from all other archetypal realities, individual and universal.

Soul in Plotinus is very much what it is in Plato, the great intermediary between the worlds of intellect and sense and the representative of the former in the latter. It proceeds from *Nous* and returns upon it and is formed by it in contemplation as *Nous* proceeds from and returns upon the One: but the relationship of Soul to *Nous* is a much more intimate one. Soul at its highest belongs to the world of *Nous*: and Plotinus hesitates a good deal over the question of whether its going out from that world to form and order the material universe is a fall, an act of illegitimate self-will and self-assertion, or a good and necessary part of the universal order. He tries hard to reconcile the two points of view and bring his thought into consistency, but he does not quite succeed. On the whole, however, the positive way of looking at the situation predominates in the *Enneads*. The activity of Universal Soul in forming and ruling the material universe is regarded as wholly good and divine. It is an activity which is, like production on higher levels, at once necessary and spontaneous, the overflowing of contemplation into action, and it takes place altogether without effort, deliberate choice, or planning.

Universal Soul has two levels, the higher where it acts

[29] Notably VI. 5. 12 (G (*b*), p. 140).

as a transcendent principle of form, order, and intelligent direction, and the lower where it operates as an immanent principle of life and growth. This lower is in fact (though Plotinus is reluctant to admit it) a fourth distinct hypostasis, and has its special name, Nature. It is related to the higher soul as the higher soul is to *Nous* and, like it, acts or produces as a necessary result of contemplation; but because its contemplation is the last and lowest sort of contemplation, a sort of dream,[30] it is too weak to produce anything which is itself productive. So what it produces is the immanent forms in body, the ultimate level of spiritual being, which are noncontemplative and so spiritually sterile and below which lies only the darkness of matter.

The characteristic of the life of Soul is movement from one thing to another; unlike *Nous* it does not possess being as a whole, but only one part at a time, and must always be moving from one to the other; it is the level of discursive thought, which does not hold its object in immediate possession but has to seek it by a process of reasoning; and its continual movement from one thing to another produces time, which is "the life of the soul in movement,"[31] and is the cause of all physical movement in space and time.

Our individual souls are "Plotinian parts" of Universal Soul, parts, that is, which in the manner proper to spiritual being have the whole in a certain sense present in them and can if they wish expand themselves by contemplation into universality and be the whole because they completely share Universal Soul's detachment from the body it rules. The individual soul's descent into body is for Plotinus both a fall and a necessary compliance with the universe and the plan of Universal Soul[32] (Plotinus here is very conscious of a tension in Plato's thought as well as in his own). The spiritual state of the soul in body depends on its attitude. If it devotes itself selfishly to the interests of the particular body to which it is attached it becomes entrapped in the atomistic particularity of the material world

[30] III. 8. 4 (E (*b*), p. 94).
[31] III. 7. 11 (E (*b*), p. 106).
[32] IV. 8. 5 (F (*c*), p. 123).

and isolated from the whole. The root sin of the soul is self-isolation, by which it is imprisoned in body and cut off from its high destiny. But the mere fact of being in body does not imply imprisonment in body. That only comes if the soul surrenders to the body; it is the inward attitude which makes the difference. It is always possible for a man in the body to rise beyond the particularism and narrowness of the cares of earthly life to the universality of transcendent Soul and to the world of *Nous*. Universal Soul is in no way hampered by the body of the universe which it contains and administers: and the celestial bodies of the star-gods in no way interfere with their spiritual life.[33] It is not embodiment as such but embodiment in an earthly, animal body which the Platonist regards as an evil and a handicap.

The material universe for Plotinus is a living, organic whole, the best possible image of the living unity-in-diversity of the World of Forms in *Nous*. It is held together in every part by a universal sympathy and harmony, in which external evil and suffering take their place as necessary elements in the great pattern, the great dance of the universe. As the work of Soul, that is as a living structure of forms, it is wholly good, and everlasting as a whole though the parts are perishable (the universe of *Nous* is of course eternal as a whole and in every part). All in it that is life and form is good; but the matter which is its substratum is evil and the principle of evil. Matter according to Plotinus never really unites with form; it remains a formless darkness on which form is merely superimposed. It is non-being in the sense not of a "zero" but a "minus," a force or principle of negation (in the Aristotelian language which he sometimes uses, Plotinus identifies *hule* with *steresis*). Matter then is responsible for the evil and imperfection of the material world: but that world is good and necessary, the best possible image of the world of spirit on the material level where it is necessary that it should express itself for the completion of the whole. It has not the goodness of its archetype but it has the goodness of the best possible image.

[33] II. 9. 8(E (*b*), p. 98).

(iii)

The return of the soul to the One has nothing to do for Plotinus with movement in space and the final union can be attained while still in the body (though, for the human soul at least, he thinks that *permanent* union is only attainable when the soul has finally left the body). The process is one of interiorization, of turning away from the external world, of concentrating one's powers inwardly instead of dissipating them outwardly, of rediscovering one's true self by the most vigorous intellectual and moral discipline, and then waiting so prepared for the One to declare His presence, for the final illumination and union. The rediscovery of one's true self is a return to *Nous*; for, as we have seen, Plotinus teaches that we are more than soul, we are *Nous*; and "we do not altogether come down"; the highest part of our selves remains in the world of *Nous* even when we are embodied (it is our archetypal original, the individual Form of which our soul is a *Logos*). And, when we are *Nous*, we can share in its self-transcendence and contemplate the One with that in our *Nous* which is not *Nous*,[34] though our experience of this highest state can only be a rare and fleeting one as long as we are handicapped by the body.

Of the final union it is better to leave Plotinus himself to speak. But there are two things about it which should be said to avoid misunderstanding. The first is that Plotinus insists that there is no short cut, no mysticism which does not demand moral and intellectual perfection. We must ascend to *Nous* first, and it is only as *Nous*, as a being perfect in wisdom and goodness, that union with the One is possible. This union transcends our intellectual and moral life because in it we ascend to the Source of intellect and goodness which is more than they are, but it is only possible because our intellectual and moral life has reached its perfection. We are "carried out by the very surge of the wave of *Nous*." [35] It is the completion and confirmation, not the negation and destruction of all that we have done

[34] V. 5. 7–8 (D (*a*), p. 66).
[35] VI. 7. 36 (G (*c*), p. 146).

ourselves (as Plotinus would say; a Christian would say, that God has done in us) to bring our selves to perfection, to the fullest consciousness and activity. And, again, because it is as *Nous* that we attain to union, it would seem that it is not Plotinus's thought that our individual personalities are finally absorbed and disappear. It is true that in the union we rise above *Nous* to a state in which there is no consciousness of difference from the One, in which there is no longer Seer and Seen, but only unity. But universal *Nous,* of which we are then a part, exists continually in that state of union without prejudice to its proper life of intuitive thought and unity-in-diversity. There is never any suggestion in Plotinus that all things except the One are illusions or fleeting appearances.

(iv)

The modern literature on Plotinus is very extensive: a complete survey of everything published up to 1949 will be found in B. Marien's *Bibliografia Critica degli Studi Plotiniani* (Bari, Laterza, 1949, published with the last volume of Cilento's translation). The first satisfactory critical edition of the text of the *Enneads,* by P. Henry and H. R. Schwyzer, is now in course of publication (vol. I, containing the first three Enneads was published in 1951 by Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, and L'Édition Universelle, Brussels). The texts of the Teubner (R. Volkmann) and Budé (É. Bréhier) editions are not at all satisfactory, though Bréhier's translation and introductions and notes to the several treatises in the Budé edition are of great value. The text of the old edition of Creuzer and Moser (reprinted with Ficino's Latin translation, Didot, 1855) is preferable to that of Volkmann and Bréhier. The great German and Italian translations of R. Harder (Leipzig, 1930-1937) and V. Cilento (Bari, 1947-1949) are most important contributions to our understanding of Plotinus. The English translation by Stephen Mackenna and B. S. Page (Medici Society, 1926-1930) is a noble and attractive piece of work, to which I am indebted for many happy renderings of particular phrases, though I have tried on the whole to give a plainer version and one closer to the

Greek. (I have used the Henry-Schwyzer text for the first three Enneads, and the Budé (Bréhier's) text, with a few, as it seems to me necessary, deviations, for the others.) The English titles for the treatises in the table on pages 40-44 are taken from Mackenna.

The most thorough and scholarly introduction to Plotinus is H. R. Schwyzer's article in *Paulys Realenzyklopädie d. klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Band XXI, 1951, col. 471-592). É. Bréhier's *La Philosophie de Plotin* (Paris, 1928) and Dr. Inge's Gifford Lectures (*The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 vols., 3rd edition, Longmans, 1929) are still well worth reading. Another good short introduction is M. de Gandillac's *La Sagesse de Plotin* (Paris, 1952).

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A

Porphyry's *Life*

1

PLOTINUS, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body. As a result of this state of mind he could never bear to talk about his race or his parents or his native country. And he objected so strongly to sitting to a painter or sculptor that he said to Amelius,[1] * who was urging him to allow a portrait of himself to be made, "Why, really, is it not enough to have to carry the image in which nature has encased us, without your requesting me to agree to leave behind me a longer-lasting image of the image, as if it was something genuinely worth looking at?" [2]

8

When Plotinus had written anything he could never bear to go over it twice; even to read it through once was too much for him, as his eyesight was not strong enough. In writing he did not form the letters with any regard to appearance or divide his syllables correctly, and he paid no attention to spelling. He was wholly concerned with the thought; and, which surprised us all, he went on in this way right up to the end. He worked out his train of thought from beginning to end in his own mind, and then, when he wrote it down, since he had set it all in order in his mind, he wrote as continuously as if he was copying from a book. Even if he was talking to someone, engaged in continuous conversation, he kept to his train of thought. He could take his necessary part in the conversation to the full and at the same time keep his mind fixed without a break on what he was considering. When the person he had been talking to was gone he did not go over what he had written, because his sight, as I have said, did not suf-

* Notes may be found at the back of the book.

fice for revision. He went straight on with what came next, keeping the connexion, just as if there had been no interval of conversation between. In this way he was present at once to himself and to others, and he never relaxed his self-turned attention except in sleep: even sleep he reduced by taking very little food; often not even a piece of bread, and by his continuous turning in contemplation to his *Nous.*

9

Many men and women of the highest rank, on the approach of death, brought him their children, both boys and girls, and entrusted them to him along with all their property, considering that he would be a holy and godlike guardian. So his house was full of young lads and maidens, including Potamon, to whose education he gave serious thought and often even listened to his revision exercises. He patiently attended to those who submitted accounts of the children's property and took care that they should be accurate; he used to say that as long as they did not take to philosophy their properties and incomes must be kept safe and untouched for them. Yet though he shielded so many from the worries and cares of ordinary life, he never, while awake, relaxed his intent concentration upon *Nous.* He was gentle, too, and at the disposal of all who had any sort of acquaintance with him. Though he spent twenty-six whole years in Rome and acted as arbitrator in very many people's disputes, he never made an enemy of any of the people of the city [or officials].

10 (end)

When Amelius grew ritualistic and took to going round visiting the temples at the New Moon and the feasts of the gods and once asked Plotinus to come with him, Plotinus said, "They ought to come to me, not I to them." [3] What he meant by this exalted utterance we could not understand and did not dare to ask.

11 (end)

He once noticed that I, Porphyry, was thinking of removing myself from this life. He came to me unexpectedly

while I was staying indoors in my house and told me that this lust for death did not come from a settled rational decision but from a bilious indisposition, and ordered me to go away for a holiday. I obeyed him and went to Sicily.

13-14

13. In the meetings of the school he showed an adequate command of language and the greatest power of discovering and considering what was relevant to the subject in hand, but he made mistakes in certain words: he did not say *anamimnesketai,* but *anamnemisketai,* and made other slips which he also committed in his writing. When he was speaking his intellect visibly lit up his face: there was always a charm about his appearance, but at these times he was still more attractive to look at: he sweated gently, and kindliness shone out from him, and in answering questions he made clear both his benevolence to the questioner and his intellectual power. Once I, Porphyry, went on asking him for three days about the soul's connexion with the body, and he kept on explaining to me. A man called Thaumasius came in who was interested in general statements and said that he wanted to hear Plotinus speaking in the manner of a set treatise, but could not stand Porphyry's questions and answers. Plotinus said, "But if when Porphyry asks questions we do not solve his difficulties we shall not be able to say anything at all in your set speech."

14. In writing he is concise and full of thought. He puts things shortly and abounds more in ideas than words; he generally expresses himself in a tone of rapt inspiration, and is guided by his own experience rather than by tradition. His writings, however, are full of concealed Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines.[4] Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* in particular, is concentrated in them. . . . In the meetings of the school he used to have the commentaries read, perhaps of Severus, perhaps of Cronius or Numenius or Gaius or Atticus,[5] and among the Peripatetics of Aspasius, Alexander, Adrastus,[6] and others that were available. But he did not just speak straight out of these books but took a distinctive personal line in his consideration, and brought

the mind of Ammonius to bear on the investigations in hand.

23

So to this godlike man, who often raised himself in thought, according to the ways Plato teaches in the *Banquet,*[7] to the First and Transcendent God, that God appeared Who has neither shape nor any intelligible form, but is throned above intellect and all the intelligible. I, Porphyry, declare that once, in my sixty-eighth year, I drew near and was united to Him. To Plotinus "the term ever near was shown": [8] for his end and term was to be united to, to approach the God above all things. Four times while I was with him he attained that term, in an unspeakable actuality and not in potency only.

B

On the Three Hypostases

II. 9. 1

[The names One and Good refer to the same transcendent First Principle, which we cannot really label and define, but must speak of as best we can. It is primary, transcendent, and indescribable because of its absolute simplicity. On it depend *Nous* and Soul, and there is no room for any other Principles besides these.]

Now it has been made clear to us that the nature of the Good is simple and primary (for everything which is not primary is not simple either), and contains nothing in itself, but is a unity: the same nature belongs to what we call the One. It is not something else, and then as a result of that One, nor is the Good something else and then as a result Good. When we speak of the One and when we speak of the Good we must think and speak of It as one and the same Nature, not applying any predicates to It, but explaining It to ourselves as best we can. We call It the First because It is the simplest, and the Self-Sufficing because It is not a compound (which would make It dependent on its constituent parts); we speak of It as That which is in nothing else, because everything which is in something else is derived from something else. If then It is neither derived from nor in something else, nor any sort of compound, there cannot be anything above It. We need not then go looking for other Principles. We set This first, then *Nous,* the primal Intelligence, then Soul after *Nous.* This is the order according to the nature of things. We must not assume more or fewer than these in the intelligible realm.

II. 9 . 3

[The law of necessary production: each Principle must eternally produce the level of being immediately below it

as a necessary consequence of its own existence: and the whole order of things is eternal: the lower world of becoming was not created at a particular moment but is eternally being generated: it is always there as a whole, and particular things in it only perish so that others may come into being.]

Each must give of its own being to something else. The Good will not be the Good, or *Nous, Nous;* Soul will not be itself, unless after the primal life some secondary life lives as long as the primal exists. All things must exist for ever in ordered dependence upon each other: those other than the First have come into being only in the sense of being derived and dependent. Things that are said to have come into being did not just come into being [at a particular moment] but always were and always will be in process of becoming: nor does anything perish except what can be transformed into something else; that which has nothing into which it can be transformed does not perish.

V. 1. 11

[The way within ourselves from Soul to *Nous* and the One. Our discursive reasoning about the right and good requires as its base something in us which is in intuitive possession of absolute rightness; this is *Nous*. And from *Nous* we can reach its source, the One or God. He is not, as *Nous* is, part of our individual personalities (or, rather, they are parts of *Nous*). He is absolutely One, immanent by His very transcendence, present to each and all according to their capacity to receive Him.]

Since there exists soul which reasons about what is right and good, and discursive reasoning which inquires about the rightness and goodness of this or that particular thing, there must be some further permanent rightness from which arises the discursive reasoning in the realm of soul. How else would soul manage to reason? And if soul sometimes reasons about the right and good and sometimes does not, there must be in us *Nous*, which does not reason discursively but always holds the absolute right. There must be, too, the Source and Cause and God of *Nous*. He is not divided, but abides: and as He does not abide in

place, He is contemplated in many things, according to the capacity of each to receive Him, as if He was now one thing and now another. It is just as the centre of a circle exists by itself, but every point of the circle contains the centre in it, and the radii bring to the centre each its own particular property.[1] By this sort of disposition in ourselves we are in contact with God and are with Him and depend upon Him: those of us who converge towards Him are firmly established in Him.

V. 2. 1

[The One transcends being because it is its source. *Nous* proceeds from the One, and Soul from *Nous*, by a double movement of outgoing and return in contemplation, the higher in each case remaining in itself, unaffected by the production of the lower. Soul in its turn produces another level of being or hypostasis, Nature, the Life-Principle.]

The One is all things and not a single one of them: for the Source of all is not all things; yet It is all things, for they all, so to speak, run back to It: or, rather, in It they are not yet, but will be. How then do all things come from the One, Which is simple and has in It no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness? It is because there is nothing in It that all things come from It: in order that being may exist, the One is not being but the Generator of being. This, we may say, is the first act of generation. The One, perfect because It seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing overflows, as it were, and Its superabundance makes something other than Itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and so becomes Its contemplator, *Nous*. Its halt and turning towards the One constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, *Nous*. Since it halts and turns towards the One that it may see, it becomes at once *Nous* and being. Resembling the One thus, *Nous* produces in the same way, pouring forth a multiple power. Just as That, Which was before it, poured forth its likeness, so what *Nous* produces is a likeness of itself. This activity springing from being is Soul, which comes into being while *Nous* abides unchanged: for

Nous too comes into being while That which is before it abides unchanged.

But Soul does not abide unchanged when it produces: it is moved and so brings forth an image. It looks to its source and is filled, and going forth to another opposed movement generates its own image, which is Sensation and the Principle of growth in plants.[2]

Nothing is separated, cut off from that which is before it. For this reason Soul seems to reach as far as plants; and in a way it does reach so far, for the life-principle in plants belongs to Soul. Soul is not all in plants, but it has come to be in plants in the sense that it has extended itself down to their level, and produced another degree of being by that extension, in desire of its inferior. Its higher part which is immediately dependent on *Nous* leaves *Nous* untroubled, abiding in itself [and in the same way is unaffected by producing the lower degree of being].

C

The One or Good

VI. 8. 13

[Inadequacy of human language in speaking about the One.]

But if we must introduce these names for what we are seeking, though it is not accurate to do so, let us say again that, speaking accurately, we must not admit even a logical duality in the One but we are using this present language in order to persuade our opponents, though it involves some deviation from accurate thought.[1] . . . We must be forgiven for the terms we use, if in speaking about Him in order to explain what we mean, we have to use language which we, in strict accuracy, do not admit to be applicable. *As if* must be understood with every term.

VI. 8. 11

[The absolute transcendence of the One as unconditioned, unlimited, Principle of all things: particular necessity of eliminating all spatial ideas from our thought about Him.]

But what is This which does not exist? We must go away silent, involved by our thought in utter perplexity, and seek no further: for what could anyone look for when there is nothing to which he can still go on? Every search moves to a first principle and stops when it has reached it.

Besides, we must consider that every inquiry is either about what a thing essentially is, or its quality, or its cause, or the fact of its existence. But the existence of That, in the sense in which we say that It exists, is known from the things which come after It; inquiry into Its cause is looking for another principle beyond It, and there is no principle of the Universal Principle. To seek Its quality is to seek what are Its incidental attributes, and It has none. To seek Its essential nature makes still more clear that we

should make no inquiry about It, but only grasp It, if we can, in our intellect and learn that it is a profanation to apply any terms to It.

We seem in general to conceive these difficulties about This Nature if we start by conceiving space and place, a sort of primal abyss, and then introduce This Nature when space already exists into the place which we imagine as having come into being or existing: when we have brought Him into this sort of place we inquire how and from where He came there. We investigate His presence and His existence as if He was a stranger, projected into our imaginary place from some depth or height. So we must get rid of the cause of our difficulties by expelling from the movement of our thought towards Him all consideration of place. We must not set Him in any place whatever, either as eternally resting and established in it or as an incomer. We must think of Him only as existing (the necessity of discussion compels us to attribute existence to Him), and of place and everything else as later than Him—place latest and last of all. Conceiving this Placeless Existence as we do, we shall not set other things round Him in a sort of circle or be able to circumscribe Him and measure His dimensions; we shall not attribute quantity to Him at all, or quality either; for He has no form, not even intelligible form: nor is He related to anything else, for He exists in and by Himself before any other thing.

V. 5. 9

[All things are in the One and the One is not in anything, but all things depend upon It.]

Look at the universe. There is no universe before it, so it is not itself in a universe or in place at all. For what place is there that exists before the universe? The parts of the universe depend upon it and are in it. Soul is not in the universe, but the universe in it; for body is not a place for soul. Soul is in *Nous,* body in soul, and *Nous* in Something Else. And This has nothing else to be in; so It is in nothing at all, and therefore in this sense nowhere. Where then are the other things? In It. It is therefore not far from the others, or in them, and there is nothing which con-

tains It, but It contains all things. It is in this way the Good of all things, because It exists and all things depend upon It, each in their own way. For this reason some are better than others, because they are more real than others.

VI. 9. 1

[The One cause of existence to all other things; for things only exist in so far as they are unities.]

It is by the One that all beings are beings, both those which are primarily beings and those which are in some way classed among beings. For what could exist if it was not one? If beings are deprived of what we call unity they do not exist. An army, a choir, or a flock do not exist if they are not one: and even a house or a ship does not exist if it has not unity, for a house is one and so is a ship, and if it loses its unity the house is no longer a house or the ship a ship.[2]

VI. 9. 3

[The One is other than all the things of which It is cause, transcending even being and beyond the reach of thought or speech.]

Since the nature of the One produces all things It is none of them. It is not a thing or quality or quantity or intellect or soul; It is not in motion or at rest, in place or in time,[3] but exists in Itself, a unique Form; or rather It is formless, existing before all form, before motion, before rest; for these belong to being and make it multiple.

Why, then, if It is not in motion, is It not at rest? Because in being one or both must be present and it is at rest by participation in the Absolute Rest and is not identical with that Rest; so Rest is present to it as an attribute and it no longer remains simple. Even when we call the One the Cause we are not predicating any attribute of It but of ourselves, because we receive something from It while It exists in Itself. Strictly speaking, we ought not to apply any terms at all to It; but we should, so to speak, run round the outside of It trying to interpret our own feelings about It, sometimes drawing near and sometimes falling away in our perplexities about It.

V. 5. 6

[The One is not form, or any particular, definable thing; so in this sense It is said to be "beyond being." But to call It "beyond being" is not to give any sort of definition of It, but simply to indicate that It is indefinable.]

The essence[4] which is generated from the One is Form (one could not say that what is generated from That Source is anything else), not the form of some one thing but of everything, so that no other form is left outside it. The One therefore must be without form, and if It is without form is not an essence: for an essence must be some one particular thing, something, that is, defined and limited. But it is impossible to apprehend the One as a particular thing; for then It would not be the Principle but only that particular thing which you said it was. But if all things are in that which is generated from the One, which of the things in it are you going to say that the One is? Since It is none of them, it can only be said to be beyond them. Now these things are beings, and being: so It is "beyond being." This phrase "beyond being" does not mean that It is a particular thing—for it makes no positive statement about It. "Beyond being" is not Its name; all it implies is that It is "not this."

VI. 9. 6

[Meaning of the term One when applied to the Supreme; it denotes absence of all limitation and absolute self-sufficiency. The One in Its self-sufficiency transcends place, movement, and the activity of thought, which implies a duality of subject and object.]

What then do we mean by "One," and how do we fit this Unity into our thought? "One" is used in more senses than that of the unity of a numerical unit or a point: in this sense the soul, taking away magnitude and numerical plurality, arrives at the smallest possible and rests on something which is certainly without parts, but belongs to the divisible and exists in something else. But the One is not in something else or in the divisible, nor is It without parts in the sense of the smallest possible. For It is the

greatest of all things, not in size but in power—that which is without magnitude can be great in power, for the things which come after It [5] are indivisible and without parts in their powers, not in their bulk. It must be considered as infinite, not by unlimited extension of size or number but by the unboundedness of Its power.

When you think of Him as Mind or God, He is still more: and when you unify Him in your thought, the degree of unity by which He transcends your thought is still greater than you imagine it to be. For He exists in and by Himself without any attributes. One might conceive of His unity in terms of His self-sufficiency. For He must be the most sufficient of all things, the most independent, and the most without wants. Everything which is multiple and not one is defective, since it is composed of many parts. Substance needs Him in order to be one: but He does not need Himself; for He is Himself. A thing which is multiple needs its full number of parts and each of its parts, since it exists with the others and not independently, is in need of the others; so a thing of this kind shows itself defective as a whole and in each individual part. If then, as is in fact true, there must be something supremely self-sufficing, it must be the One, Which is the only Thing of such a kind as not to be defective either in relation to Itself or to anything else.

It seeks nothing towards Its being or Its well-being or Its establishment in Its place. It does not derive Its being from others, for It is the Cause of the others; and what from outside Itself could conduce to Its well-being? To be in a good state is not something accidental to It, for It is the Good. And It has no place: It needs no establishing as if It could not support Itself; that which has to be established is a lifeless mass which falls till it is set in place. All other things are established through It. Through It they at once exist and receive the place ordained for each. That which seeks place is defective. But a principle has no need of what comes after it; and the Principle of all things needs none of them; for that which is defective is defective because it is in quest of a principle. Then again, if the One is defective, it is clear that It is seeking not to be one; that

is, It is in need of something to destroy It. But everything which is said to be in need is in need of well-being and something to preserve it: so there is nothing which is good for the One, nor does It wish for anything.

It transcends good, and is Good not for Itself, but for the others, if any of them can participate in It. It is not thought, for there is no otherness in It. It is not movement, but prior to movement and thought. For what would It think about? Itself? But then It would be ignorant before Its thought, and would need thought to know Itself, It which is self-sufficient! There is no ignorance in It because It does not know or think Itself, because ignorance is always of something else, when one of two things does not know the other. But That Which is One Alone neither knows nor has anything of which to be ignorant; being One, present to Itself, It needs no thought of Itself. We ought not in fact even to speak of "self-presence," in order to preserve the unity. We should leave out thought and self-presence, and thinking about Itself and other things. We ought not to class It as a thinking being but rather as thought; for thought does not think, but is cause of thinking to something else; and the cause is not the same as its effect. So the Cause of all things is none of them. We should not even speak of It as Good, in the sense of the good which It gives to others. It is the Good in a different sense, transcending all other goods.

VI. 7. 37 (end)-38 (beginning)

[The Good is not unintelligent, though He does not think, because in His absolute self-sufficiency He does not need to have any function or activity, even the highest, the intellectual activity of *Nous*. Even to say "He is" or "He is good" does not express adequately his self-sufficiency, which is beyond being as we know it.]

An intelligence without intellection would be unintelligent; for when a thing's nature implies knowing, it is unintelligent if it does not know. But when a thing has no function, why should one attribute a function to it and then describe it in terms of defect because it does not perform it? You might as well call the Good unmedical [as

unintelligent]. But He has no function, because there is nothing which it is incumbent on Him to do. He suffices, and need seek nothing beyond Himself since He transcends all things. He suffices to Himself and to the others, being what He is.

But even to say "He is" is not really adequate; for He does not need even this. Nor does "He is good" apply to Him, but only to a being of which we can say "He is." "He is" can only be applied to Him, not as we say one thing about another, but as indicating what He is. And we say "The Good" about Him not as applying a predicate to Him, saying that the Good is an attribute of His, but as saying that the Good is He Himself.

VI. 7. 38 (end)-39 (beginning)

[The Good exists before any thought of Him, and so does not need to think of Himself. He only has a simple intuition of Himself, and this is identical with Himself and does not imply any duality of subject and object, thinker and thought.]

If the thought of the Good is other than the Good, then the Good exists already before the thought of It. But if the Good exists before the thought of It, then It will suffice to Itself for being the Good and will have no need of the thought about Itself; so that It does not think Itself as Good. As what then? There is nothing other present to It: It will have only a kind of simple intuition directed to Itself. But since It is in no way distant or different from Itself, what can this intuitive regard of Itself be other than Itself?

V. 4. 2

[The One (here, exceptionally, called the Intelligible) does not think like *Nous* but has, nevertheless, a thought and consciousness of Its own.]

The Intelligible remains by Itself, and is not deficient like that which sees and thinks (I call that which thinks [i.e. *Nous*] deficient as compared with the Intelligible), but It is not like something senseless; all things belong to It and are in It and with It. It is completely able to discern Itself; It has life in Itself and all things in Itself. Its think-

ing of Itself is Itself, and exists by a kind of immediate self-consciousness, in everlasting rest and in a manner of thinking different from that of *Nous*.

VI. 8. 14 (end)-15 (beginning)

[The One or Good is beyond chance or contingency, the self-caused transcendent Absolute. He loves Himself, and His love of Himself is one with His being.]

The Father of reason, of cause, and of the substance which causes, all of which are far removed from chance, would be the Principle and something like the Exemplar of all things which have no share in chance.[6] He would be really and primarily clear of chance happenings and the casual and accidental, the cause of Himself, Himself from Himself and through Himself: for He is primarily and beyond all being Himself.

He is at once Lovable and Love and Love of Himself, since He is only beautiful from Himself and in Himself. For He could not be united with Himself unless that which unites were one and the same with that to which it is united. But if the two are one and the same and what we may call the desiring is one with the desired (by the desired is meant the substance, something like the underlying reality), again it is clear to us that the desire and the essential being are the same. And if this is so, again we see that it is He who makes Himself and is Master of Himself, and has not come to be what something else willed, but is as He wills Himself.

VI. 8. 16

[Meaning of the statement "The Good is everywhere and nowhere." All things are in Him. How the Good eternally and without change or process gives Himself being by an eternal activity of living and willing Himself and a mysterious awareness of Himself which transcends even the highest intellectual knowledge, that of *Nous*.]

We maintain, and it appears to be true, that the Good is everywhere and nowhere. We must consider this carefully and see how it bears upon our present inquiry. If He is nowhere, He has not just happened anywhere, and if

He is everywhere, then "everywhere" is the same size as He is: so He is the "everywhere" and "in every way" Himself and not *in* the "everywhere." He is that everywhere Himself and gives other things their being, neighbouring each other in the everywhere. He holds the supreme place—or rather does not hold it but is Himself Supreme—and has all things subject to Him. He is not a contingent attribute of other things but they of Him, or rather they stand around Him, looking to Him, not He to them. He is borne, so to speak, to His own interior as if in love of the clear light which is Himself: and He is what He loves. That is, He gives Himself being, since He is a self-dwelling activity and His supreme object of love is like an intellect: now intellect is an act; therefore He is an act, but not the act of another. So He is His own act, and is what He is not by chance but according to His own activity.

Again, if He pre-eminently is because in a kind of way He holds firmly towards Himself and looks towards Himself, and what we call His being is this look towards Himself, He in a way might be said to make Himself. So He is not "as He happened to be," but as He Himself wills. His will is not arbitrary or just as it happened: the will which wills the best is not arbitrary.

That this self-directed inclination of His, which is as it were His activity and abiding in Himself, makes His being what It is is shown by assuming the contrary. For if He inclines to what is outside Himself, He will lose His essential being; so His essential being is His self-directed activity; and this is one with Himself. So He gives Himself being, for His activity continually accompanies Him. If then His activity never came to be, but always was, and is a kind of wakening (the wakener being no other than Himself), an eternal wakening of super-intellection, then He is as He waked Himself to be. The wakening is beyond being and *Nous* and conscious life: that is, it is Himself. He is then an activity transcending *Nous* and reasoning thought and life: these come from Him and not from another. His being then is self-caused, self-originated. He is not "as he happened to be" but as He wills.

V. 5. 12

[The Good, and the unconscious, innate, desire of the Good are prior to Beauty, even the Absolute Beauty of the world of *Nous* and the conscious, disturbing desire which it arouses. The Good is present to all and has produced all things, Beauty included, but needs none of them and is absolutely unaffected by them.]

One must perceive each thing by the appropriate organ, some things with the eyes, others with the ears, and so on. One must believe, too, that one sees other things with the intellect, and not think that intellectual perception is seeing or hearing, which would be like insisting that the ears should see and that sounds do not exist because they are not visible. And we must consider that men have forgotten That which from the beginning, and now still, they want and long for. For everything reaches out to That and longs for It by necessity of nature, as if divining by instinct that it cannot exist without It.

The grasp of the Beautiful[7] and the wonder and the waking of love for it come to those who in a way already know it and are awake to it. But the Good was there long before, arousing an innate desire. It is present even to those asleep and does not astonish those who at any time see It, because It is always there and there is never recollection of It: but people do not see It, because It is present to them in their sleep. The passionate love of Beauty, when it comes, causes pain, because one must have seen it to desire it. Beauty is shown to be secondary because this passionate love for it is secondary and is felt by those who are already conscious. But the more ancient, unperceived desire of the Good proclaims that the Good Itself is more ancient and prior to Beauty.

All men think that when they have attained the Good it is sufficient for them: they have reached their end. But not all see Beauty, and they think it exists for itself and not for them: this applies too to beauty here; it belongs exclusively to the beautiful person. And it is enough for people to seem to be beautiful, even if they are not so really; but they do not want to have the Good in seeming only. Then

they dispute the first place with Beauty and wrangle contentiously with it, considering that it has come into being like themselves. It is as if someone who holds the lowest rank at court were to want to attain equal honour with the man who stands next to the king, on the ground that they both derive from one and the same source; he does not realize that though he too depends on the king the other takes rank before him. The cause of the error is that both participate in the Same and the One is before both, and that There too the Good Itself does not need Beauty, though Beauty needs It.

The Good is gentle and kindly and gracious and present to anyone when he wishes. Beauty brings wonder and shock and pleasure mingled with pain, and even draws those who do not know what is happening away from the Good, as the beloved draws a child away from its father: for Beauty is younger. But the Good is older, not in time but in truth, and has the prior power; for It has all power. That which comes after It has not all power, but as much as can come after It and derive from It. The Good then is Master of this derived power. He does not need the things which have come into being from Him, but leaves them all altogether alone, because He needs none of them, but is the same as He was before He brought them into being. He would not have cared if they had not come into being; and if anything else could be derived from Him He would not grudge it existence. But as it is, it is not possible for anything else to come into being; all things have come into being, and there is nothing left. He is not all things; if He were He would need them: but since He transcends all things He can make them and let them exist by themselves while He remains above them.

V. 4. 1 (end)

[How the One produces other things; the principle of necessary emanation or radiation.]

If the First is perfect, the most perfect of all, and the primal Power, It must be the most powerful of beings and the other powers must imitate It as far as they are able. Now when anything else comes to perfection we see that it

produces, and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else. This is true not only of things which have choice but of things which grow and produce without choosing to do so, and even lifeless things, which impart themselves to others as far as they can. So fire warms, snow cools, drugs act on other things; everything seems to imitate the Principle as far as it is able by tending to everlastingness and generosity. How then could the Most Perfect, the First Good, the Power of all things, remain in Itself as if It grudged Itself or was unable to produce? How would it then still be the Principle?

D

Nous

(*a*) *In its Relation to the One*

V. 1. 6

[The One produces *Nous* without any movement or change in Itself by a sort of emanation or radiation. The product is necessarily less than the producer; but since the One is the most perfect of all things, its product is necessarily that which is next in order of perfection, namely *Nous*.]

How then does *Nous* see, and what does it see? How did it come into existence at all and arise from the One so as to be able to see? The soul now knows that these things must be, but longs to answer the question repeatedly discussed, even by the ancient philosophers, how from the One, if It is such as we say It is, a multiplicity or a duality or a number come into existence. Why did It not remain by Itself? How did so great a multitude flow from It as that which we see to exist in beings but think it right to refer back to the One?

Let us speak of it in this way, first invoking God Himself, not in spoken words, but reaching out with our soul into prayer to Him; for in this way we can pray alone to Him Alone. The man who contemplates Him, as if inside the temple,[1] existing by Himself, remaining quiet beyond all things, must contemplate what correspond to the images already standing outside the temple, or rather that one image which appeared first; and this is the way in which it appeared. Everything which is moved must have some end to which it moves. The One has no such end, so we must not consider that It moves. If anything comes into being after It, we must think that it necessarily does so while the One remains continually turned towards Itself. (When we are discussing eternal realities we must not let coming into being in time be an obstacle to our thought;

in the discussion we speak of them coming into being to indicate their causal connexion and their order.) We must admit then that what comes into being from the One does so without the One being moved: for if anything came into being as a result of the One's being moved, it would be the third starting from the One, not the second, since it would come after the movement. So if there is a second after the One it must have come to be without the One moving at all, without any inclination or act of will or any sort of activity on Its part.

How did it come to be then? And what are we to think of as surrounding the One in Its repose? It must be a radiation from It while It remains unchanged, just like the bright light which surrounds the sun, which remains unchanged though the light springs from it continually. Everything that exists, as long as it remains in being, necessarily produces from its own substance, in dependence on its present power, a surrounding reality directed towards the external world, a kind of image of the archetype from which it was produced. Thus fire produces its heat: snow does not only keep its cold inside itself. Perfumed things show this particularly clearly. As long as they exist they diffuse something from themselves around them which everything near them enjoys. Again, all things when they come to perfection produce. The One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; and Its product is less than Itself.[2] What then must we say about the Most Perfect? Nothing can come from It except that which is next greatest after It. *Nous* is next to It in greatness and second to It; for *Nous* sees It and needs It alone; but It has no need of *Nous*. That which derives from something greater than *Nous* is *Nous* itself, which is greater than all things, because other things come after it. So Soul is a *Logos* and a kind of activity of *Nous*, as *Nous* is of the One.

V. 5. 7–8

[*Nous* sees the One in a contemplation higher than its normal activity of intelligence, as when the eye looks at

light, not at the objects illuminated. In this contemplation it, so to speak, stands still, but has to return from it to its normal activity of intelligence, which is a sort of movement though not in space; it has a twofold life, of intelligence and of contemplation of the One with that in it which is higher than Intelligence.]

So *Nous,* veiling itself from other things and drawing itself inward, when it is not looking at anything will see a Light, not illuminating something else different from It, but suddenly appearing, alone by Itself in independent purity. *Nous* is at a loss to know whence it has appeared, whether It has come from outside or is within, and after going away from It will say, "It was within, and yet It was not within." But one should not inquire whence It comes, for there is no "whence," and It does not really come or go away anywhere, but appears or does not appear. So one must not chase after It, but wait quietly till It appears, preparing oneself to contemplate It, as the eye awaits the rising of the sun: and the sun rising over the horizon (from Ocean, the poets say), gives itself to the eyes to see. But from where does He of Whom the sun is an image rise? What is the horizon which He mounts above when He appears? He is above *Nous* which contemplates Him. *Nous* stands turned to its contemplation, looking to nothing but the Beautiful, all turned and giving itself up to Him: motionless and filled with strength, it sees first of all itself become more beautiful, all glittering, because He is near. But He does not come as one expected; his coming is without approach. He appears not as having come but as being there before all things, and even before *Nous* came. It is *Nous* which comes and goes, because it does not know where to stay and where He stays, for He is in nothing. If it was possible for *Nous* to abide in that nowhere—I do not mean that *Nous* is in place; it is no more in place than He is, but in that sense absolutely nowhere—it would always behold Him or, rather, not behold Him but be one with Him, not two. But as it is, because it is *Nous,* it contemplates Him, when it does contemplate, with that in it which is not *Nous.*

V. 3. 10–11

[The One does not need to think; It possesses Itself perfectly without any need of thought. Knowledge is always a process of completion, the fulfilling of a want. *Nous* eternally seeks to know the One, but cannot grasp It in Its absolute Unity and Simplicity, and so thinks It in a multitude of images, which are the Forms.]

The One will not need to be inquisitive about Itself; for what will It learn by thinking? Its being belongs to It before there is any thought. Knowledge is a kind of wanting, and a finding by one who has been seeking. That which is absolutely simple remains turned towards Itself and does not seek to know anything about Itself: but that which unfolds itself must be multiple.

So Nous is multiple, when it wants to think That which transcends it. For it does think It, but when it wants to apprehend It in Its simplicity it comes out grasping a succession of different things which it has multiplied in itself. It tends towards the One not as *Nous* but as sight which does yet see, and it comes away holding a multiplicity which it has made itself. So it desires one thing of which it has in itself an indefinite representation and comes away holding another in itself which it has made multiple. It has an impression of That which is the object of its vision, or it would not have admitted its presence in itself; but the impression becomes multiple instead of one, and it sees it by this way of knowing, and so becomes sight which sees. At this stage it is really *Nous,* when it grasps its object, and grasps it as *Nous*. Before this it is only desire and unformed vision.

VI. 7. 15

[The rich pure life of *Nous,* embracing many lives in one, far transcends all lives here below: but it is itself only a multiple image of the Good or One, which *Nous* cannot think in Its simplicity and so images in the unity-in-diversity of the Forms.]

This life then, the manifold, the all-including, the first

and one, who is there who when he sees it does not long to be in it and scorn all other life? The other lives below are darkness, little, dim, and cheap, impure and soiling the pure. If you look at these you do not see the pure lives and do not live them all at once; for in them there is nothing which does not live, and live in purity with no evil in it. Evil is here, where life and *Nous* only leave their imprints. The original which makes the imprints is There. Plato calls it "that which has the form of Good" because it holds the Good in the Forms. There is the Good, and *Nous* is good because its life consists in contemplation. The objects which it contemplates have the form of Good, those which it acquired when it contemplated the nature of the Good. The Good came to it, not as He is in His transcendence, but as Nous received Him. For the Good is the principle of the beings in *Nous,* and their existence in *Nous* derives from Him, and *Nous* draws power to make them from Him. For it was not in the nature of things for *Nous* to look upon the Good and think nothing, nor yet for it to think the Good's own content; for then it would have produced nothing itself. So it received from the Good power to produce and to fill itself with its own products. The Good gives what He does not Himself possess. From Him, Who is One, comes a multiplicity to *Nous*. For *Nous* was unable to hold the power it took from the Good and broke it up and made the one power many, so that it might be able to bear it piece by piece. So whatever it produced came from the power and has the form of the Good, and *Nous* itself is good, composed of things which have the form of the Good, a variegated good. So one might compare it to a living sphere of varied colour and pattern or something all faces, shining with living faces, or imagine all the pure souls gathered together, with no defect but complete in all their parts, and universal *Nous* set at their highest point, illumining the region with intellectual light. If one imagined it like this one would be seeing it from outside, as something different from oneself. But we have to become it ourselves and make ourselves that which we contemplate.

VI. 7. 22

[The beauty of the Forms in *Nous* cannot move the soul to love by itself; it must be illumined, coloured, wakened to life by the Good.]

When anyone sees this light [from the Good], then he is really moved to the Forms and longs for the light which plays upon them and delights in it; just as with the bodies here below our desire is not for the material things themselves but for the beauty mirrored in them. Each thing has its own particular nature, but it only becomes desirable when the Good colours it, giving a kind of grace to the things desired and inspiring passion in those who desire them. Then the soul, receiving into itself an outflow from Thence, is moved and dances wildly and is all stung with longing and becomes love.[3] Before this it is not moved even towards *Nous,* for all its beauty: the beauty of *Nous* is ineffective till it catches a light from the Good, and the soul by itself lies flat and is completely ineffective and is not stirred by the presence of *Nous.* But when a kind of warmth from Thence comes upon it, it gains strength and wakes and is truly winged; and though it is moved with passion for that which lies close by it, yet all the same it rises higher, to something greater which it seems to remember. And as long as there is anything higher than that which is present to it, it naturally goes on upwards, lifted by the Giver of its love. It rises above *Nous,* but cannot go on above the Good, for there is nothing above. If it remains in *Nous* it sees fair and noble things, but has not yet quite grasped what it is seeking. It is as if it was in the presence of a face which is certainly beautiful, but cannot catch the eye because it has no grace playing upon its beauty. So here below, too, beauty, that which is really lovely, is what illuminates good proportions rather than the good proportions themselves. For why is there more light of beauty on a living face, and only a trace of it on a dead one, even if its flesh and its proportions are not yet wasted away? And are not statues more beautiful if they are more lifelike, even if others are better proportioned; and is not an ugly living man more beautiful than a beautiful

statue?[4] Yes, because the living is more desirable; and it is more desirable because it has soul; and it has soul because it has more the form of Good; and this means that it is somehow coloured by the light of the Good, and so wakes and rises up and lifts up that which belongs to it, and as far as it can wakes it and makes it good.

(*b*) *As World of Forms—Intellect*

V. 9. 6 and beginning of 8

[The unity of the Forms (the real beings) in *Nous* described by analogy with unities-in-diversity on the lower planes of Soul and Nature.]

Let *Nous* then be the real beings, and let all of them be in it, not as if it held them in place, but as holding itself and being one with them. They are all together There, and none the less are distinct. We can understand this by considering that the soul too contains in itself many different items of knowledge, but they are not at all confused and each when required performs its own function, and does not bring the others along with it; each thought acts clear of all the others which remain latent in the mind. In this way, but to a much greater degree, *Nous* is all things together, and yet not all together, in the sense that each is a particular power. *Nous* as a whole includes all things as a genus does the species or a whole the parts. The powers of seeds provide a likeness of what we are talking about: for all the parts are present undistinguished in the whole, and the *logoi*[1] are there as if in a single centre. One is the *logos* of an eye, another of the hands; they are known to be different by reason of the perceptible things which are brought into being by them.

If the intellection of *Nous* is of something internal to it, then this something internal is the internal Form, and this is the Idea. What then precisely is this? *Nous* and intelligent substance; each individual idea is not something other than *Nous,* but is *Nous. Nous* as a whole is all the Forms and each individual Form is an individual *Nous,* as a whole science is all its theorems and each theorem is a part of the whole science, not spatially separated from the

whole but with its particular efficacy in the whole. This *Nous* is, in itself and possessing itself, an everlasting fullness.

V. 8. 3–4

[The unity-in-multiplicity of the world of *Nous,* where each part is the whole. Contemplation in *Nous,* without satiety or weariness. The wisdom of *Nous,* which is its being.]

The gods who are in heaven, since they are free for contemplation, continually contemplate, as if at a distance, the things in that higher heaven of *Nous* into which they raise their heads: but the gods in that higher heaven, all those who dwell upon it and in it, contemplate through their abiding in the whole of that heaven. For all things There are heaven; earth and sea and animals and plants and men are heaven; everything which belongs to that higher heaven is heavenly. The gods in it do not reject as unworthy of contemplation men or anything else that is There; it is worthy because it is There: they travel, always at rest, through all that higher country and region. The "easy life" is There. Truth is their mother and nurse and being and food. They see all things, not those which come to be but those which really are, and they see themselves in them: for all things There are transparent, and there is nothing dark or opaque; everything is clear, altogether and to its inmost part, to everything, for light is transparent to light. Each There has everything in itself and sees all things in every other, for all are everywhere and each and every one is all, and the glory is unbounded: for each of them is great, because even the small is great: the sun There is all the stars, and each star is the sun and all the others. One particular kind of being stands out in each, but in each all are manifest.

Movement There is pure; for the mover does not trouble it in its going by being different from it. Rest is not disturbed, for it is not mingled with that which is not at rest. Beauty is just beauty, since it does not exist in that which is not beautiful. Each walks not as if on alien soil, but each one's place is its very self, and when it goes on

the place where it came from goes with it; it is not one thing itself and its place another. The thing itself is *Nous* and its ground is *Nous*. It is as if one were to imagine that this visible heaven of ours which is luminous produced the light which comes from it; but here different lights come from different parts, and each is only a part; There each comes always from the whole and is part and whole at once; it has the appearance of a part, but a penetrating look sees the whole in it, supposing that someone had the sort of sight which the story goes that Lynceus had, who saw into the inside of the earth, a story which symbolizes the sight they have There. They do not grow weary of contemplation There, or so filled with it as to cease contemplating: for there is no emptiness which would result in their being satisfied when they had filled it and reached their end: and things are not different from each other so as to make what belongs to one displeasing to another with different characteristics: and nothing There wears out or wearies. There is a lack of satisfaction There in the sense that fullness does not cause contempt for that which has produced it: for that which sees goes on seeing still more, and, perceiving its own infinity and that of what it sees, follows its own nature. There is no weariness in life There, since it is pure; for how should that which lives the best life grow weary? This life is wisdom, wisdom not acquired by reasonings, but always all present, without any failing which would make it need to be searched for. It is the first, not derived from any other wisdom; the very being of *Nous* is wisdom; it does not exist first and then become wise. For this reason there is no greater wisdom: absolute knowledge has its throne beside *Nous* in their common revelation, as they say symbolically Justice is throned beside Zeus. All things of this kind There are like images seen by their own light, to be beheld by exceedingly blessed spectators. The greatness and the power of this wisdom can be imagined if we consider that it has with it and has made all beings. All things follow it, and it is the beings which came to be along with it. Both are one, and reality is wisdom There. We do not arrive at understanding this because we consider that the different

branches of knowledge are made up of theorems and a collection of propositions, which is not true even of the sciences here below.

VI. 7. 9

[In the world of *Nous* are the Forms of all things that exist in the world of the senses, even irrational animals (and non-living things), but they are all alive and intelligent There, living thought-realities in the Divine Intellect, and each is in a sense the whole and the whole is in every part.]

But, someone will say, granted that the noble forms of life are there, how can the base and irrational exist in *Nous?* It is clear that the base is the irrational, since the noble is the rational; if it is intelligence which makes things noble, it is lack of intelligence which makes them the opposite. Yet how can anything be unintelligent or irrational when they all exist in and come from *Nous?* Before we speak about this and answer these questions, let us consider that just as man here is not the same as man in *Nous,* so the other living creatures are not the same here and There; one must consider those There in a larger way. Besides, there are no rational beings There; man here perhaps is rational, but the man There is before and above reasoning. Why then does man reason here, but other things do not? It is because there is a difference There in the intellection of man and of the other living creatures, and consequently a difference in their rationality here; and there are in a way many rational activities in the other living creatures. But why are they not just as rational as man? And why are some men less rational than others? One must consider that, as there are many lives There—a kind of movements—and many thoughts, they could not be the same; they must be different lives and thoughts. There must be degrees of brightness and clearness, first, second, and third, according to their nearness to the first principles. So some thoughts are gods, others of a second kind, to which belongs what we call rationality here, and below these comes what is called the irrational. But There what we speak of as irrational is reason, and

the unthinking as *Nous,* for what thinks a horse is *Nous,* and the thought of a horse is *Nous.* If it was only a thought, there would be nothing absurd in its being really a thought of something unthinking. But if thought and thing are the same, how can the thought be a thought and the thing be unthinking? That would mean that *Nous* would make itself unthinking. But it is not an unthinking thing but a particular *Nous,* since it is a particular life. For just as a particular life does not cease to be life, so a particular *Nous* does not cease to be *Nous.* The *Nous* which thinks a particular living thing does not cease to be the *Nous* of everything (including, for instance, man), since every part, whichever one you take, is all things, though in a different way from the way in which it is a part. It is actually that particular part but potentially all things. What we grasp in each particular is what it is actually; but what it is actually is the last and lowest point in its development; so the last phase of this particular *Nous* is horse; horse is where it stopped in its continuous going forth towards a lesser life; another *Nous* will stop at something lower still. As the powers unfold they always leave something behind above. They lose something continually as they go forth; and, as they lose one thing after another, they see the defectiveness of the living being which has appeared as the result of the loss, and find something else to add to it. For instance, if it has not still sufficient means to preserve life, nails or talons or fangs or horns appear: so exactly where *Nous* descends it rises again by attaining natural self-sufficiency and finds ready in itself the cure for the defect.

VI. 7. 12

[The world of *Nous* is the pattern of the material universe here below, and everything that is here is also There, but all alive, united in a rich fullness of eternal life.]

Or, again, let us put it this way. Since we say that this universe here is modelled on the world of *Nous,* every living thing must be There first; if the being of *Nous* is complete it must be everything. Heaven There must be a living thing, and so not bare of stars (it is they which are really called heaven here, and the essence of heaven is

starriness). There too, clearly, is earth, not barren but far fuller of life, and in it are all living beings which are called land animals here, and all plants clearly too, rooted in life. Sea too is There, and all water, in a flow and life which abides, and all the living beings in water; the nature of air is part of the universe There, and the creatures of air are There correspondingly. Must not the things in a living medium be alive, in which there are living things even here? How could it be possible for any living creature not to be There? For just as each of the great parts of the universe is There, so it must be with the nature of the living beings in them. In just the same way in which heaven is There, the living beings in heaven are There; and it is impossible for them not to be, or the heaven itself would not be There. So he who inquires whence the living things come, is inquiring whence the heaven There comes; and this amounts to asking the origin of living reality There; and this is the same as asking whence comes life, and universal life and universal Soul and universal *Nous,* in that world There where there is no poverty or impotence, but everything is filled full of life, boiling with life. Things There flow in a way from a single source, not like one particular breath or warmth, but as if there were a single quality containing in itself and preserving all qualities, sweet taste and smell and the quality of wine with all other flavours, visions of colours and all that touch perceives, all too that hearing hears, all tunes and every rhythm.

V. 7. 1

[There are Forms of individuals; our personalities have eternal principles in the intelligible world. Arguments drawn from reincarnation and the Stoic doctrine of eternal recurrence do not serve to disprove this. We are made individuals by form, not matter. We must not be afraid of the infinity which this introduces into the intelligible world, as it is an infinity of power in an indivisible unity.]

Is there an Idea of each individual? Yes, if I and each one of us have a way of ascent and return to the intelligible, the principle of each of us is There. If Socrates and

the soul of Socrates always exists, there will be an absolute Socrates, as we say, There, according to which his soul will have individuality There as well as here.

But suppose Socrates does not always exist, but the soul which was formerly Socrates becomes different people at different times, like Pythagoras or someone else, then there will not be a particular Socrates in the intelligible world. Yes, but if the soul of each individual possesses the *logoi* of all the individuals which it animates in succession, then all will exist There: and we do say that each soul possesses all the *logoi* in the whole universe. If then the universe possesses the *logoi* not only of man but of all individual animals, so does the soul. Then the number of *logoi* in it will be infinite, unless the universe returns on itself in regular periods: this will put a limit to the infinity of *logoi,* because the same things in this case recur. Well, then, if in this way the things which come into being are in all the periods together more numerous than their models, why should there have to be *logoi* and models of all the things which come into being in one period? One man as model would do for all men, just as souls limited in number produce an infinity of men (in successive periods). No, there cannot be the same *logos* for different individuals, and one man will not serve as model for several men differing from each other not only by reason of their matter but with a vast number of differences of form. Men are not related to their Form as portraits of Socrates are to their original; their different structures must result from different *logoi.* The whole revolution of the universe contains all the *logoi,* and when it repeats itself it produces the same things again according to the same *logoi.* We ought not to be afraid of the infinity which this introduces into the intelligible world; for it is all in an indivisible unity and, we may say, comes forth when it acts.

V. 5. 1

[If the objects of the thought of *Nous* (the Platonic Forms) are alive and intelligent (as Plotinus maintains) then they and *Nous* form a unity of some sort: if they are not, they must be either mere verbal expressions, or some

sort of material realities, which leads to absurd consequences. And if they are not in *Nous* there is no truth in *Nous,* which means that truth does not exist at all.]

Either the objects of thought are without perception, and without any share of life or intelligence, or they have intelligence. If they have intelligence, then they have in them truth and the primary *Nous* both at once, and we shall proceed to investigate how truth and the intelligible and *Nous* are related in this unity-in-duality; are they together in one and the same reality, but also two and diverse, or how are they related? But if they are without intelligence and life, why are they real at all? Premises or axioms or expressions are not real. They are used in speaking about other things and are not real things themselves, as when one says "Justice is beautiful," though Justice and Beauty are different from the words used. But if our opponents say that the objects of thought are simple realities, Justice by itself and Beauty by itself, then first of all (if they are outside *Nous*) the intelligible will not be a unity or in a unity, but each object of thought will be cut off from the others. Well, then, where will they be? What distances separate them? How will *Nous* find them when it runs round looking for them? And how will it stay in its place? How will it remain identical with itself? Whatever sort of shape or imprint will it receive from them? Unless we assume that they are like images set up, made of gold or some other material by a sculptor or engraver. But if this is so, then *Nous* which contemplates them will be sense-perception. And why should one of things like these be Righteousness, and another some other virtue? But the greatest objection of all is this. If one admits that the objects of thought are as completely as possible outside *Nous,* and that *Nous* contemplates them as absolutely outside it, then it cannot possess the truth of them and must be deceived in everything which it contemplates. They are the true realities; and on this supposition it will contemplate them without possessing them; it will only get images of them in a knowledge of this sort. If then it does not possess the true reality, but only receives in itself images of the truth, it will have falsities and nothing true.

If it knows that what it has is false, it will admit that it has no part in truth: but if it does not know even this, and thinks it has the truth when it has not, the falsehood in it will be doubled and will set it far away from the truth. (This is the reason, I think, why there is no truth in the senses, only opinion; opinion is opinion because it receives something, and what it receives is different from that from which it receives it.) So if there is not truth in *Nous,* then a *Nous* without truth will not be truth, or truly *Nous,* or *Nous* at all. But then truth will not be anywhere else either.

V. 1. 4

[The world of *Nous* contrasted with the world of time and change here below; its eternal perfection and self-sufficiency; its unity-in-diversity of thought and object of thought; the Categories of the world of *Nous.*]

One might come to see it also in the following way. If you admire the size and beauty of this visible world of ours, as you gaze upon the order of its everlasting movement, and the gods in it, both visible and invisible and the daemons and all the animals and plants; then rise up to its pattern, to the truer reality. There look upon all the intelligible things which exist eternally in it with their own intimate consciousness and life, and *Nous* in its purity presiding over them, and irresistible wisdom, and the true life of the age of Cronos, of the god who is fullness and *Nous.* For he includes in himself all the immortals, every particular *Nous,* every god, every soul, all at rest for ever. For why should he seek change when all is well with him? Where could he move to, when he has all things in himself? And he does not seek enlargement, since he is most perfect. Therefore all things in him are perfect, that he may be altogether perfect with nothing imperfect in him; he has nothing in his world which does not think; and his thought is not seeking but possession. His blessedness is not something acquired from an outside source. It is all things eternally, in the true eternity which time imitates, circling round Soul, abandoning one thing to attend to another. In Soul there are always different things, now

Socrates, now a horse, always some one particular being; but *Nous* is all things. It has in itself all things at rest in the same place; it simply *is,* and always *is,* and there is no room in it for any future, for it *is* in the future too. Nor has it any past, for nothing There passes away, but all things remain, always the same because they are, we may say, well pleased to be as they are. Each of them is *Nous* and being, and the totality of them is universal *Nous* and universal being. *Nous* makes being exist by thinking it, and being as object of thought gives thinking and existence to *Nous.* (But there is another cause of thinking, which is also cause of being; so both together have another cause.) For being and *Nous* exist together and never leave each other, but the two of them make this unity which is at once *Nous* and being, thought and object of thought; it is *Nous* as thought, being as object of thought. There could be no thought without Otherness and Sameness. So the primary things are *Nous,* Being, Otherness, and Sameness; and we must add Motion and Rest.[2] There must be movement if there is thought, and rest to keep it the same. Then if you take away otherness it will pass into the silence of unity; and the objects of thought, too, must have otherness in relation to each other. And there must be sameness, since it is one in itself, and all the objects of thought have something in common; and the distinctive quality of each is otherness. The fact that there are several of these primaries makes number and quantity; and the particularity of each makes quality; and from these as principles all other things come.

VI. 2. 8

[How we discover the five categories applicable to the intelligible world, Being, Motion, Rest, Sameness, and Otherness. Plotinus explains what we mean when we apply these predicates to *Nous.*]

Observe *Nous* in its purity. Look upon it with concentrated gaze, not with these bodily eyes. You see the hearth of being and a sleepless light on it; you see how beings rest in it and are distinct and all together; you see abiding life and a thought whose activity is not directed towards the future but towards the present, or rather the perpetual

present, the everlasting now, a thought thinking in itself and not outside. In its thinking there is activity and motion, in its thinking itself, substance and being. Existing, it thinks itself as existent and the being on which it is, so to speak, founded. Its self-directed activity is not substance, but being is that to which the activity is directed and from which it comes. That which it looks at is being, not its look: but the look too possesses being, because it comes from and is directed to being. And since it is an act, not in potency, it gathers the two [being and thought] together again and does not separate them, but makes itself being and being itself. Being is the most firmly set of all things and that about which all other things have established their rest; it has a rest which does not come to it from outside but is from itself and in itself. It is that in which thought comes to a stop, though thought is a rest which has no beginning, and from which it starts, though thought is a rest which never started: for movement does not begin from or end in movement. Again, the Form at rest is the defining limit of intelligence, and intelligence is the motion of the Form, so that all are one; movement and rest are one, and are all-pervading kinds; and each subsequent thing is a particular being, a particular rest, and a particular motion.

Now when anyone sees these three, having come into intuitive contact with the nature of being, he sees being by the being in himself and the others, motion and rest, by the motion and rest, in himself, and fits his own being, motion, and rest to those in *Nous*: they come to him together in a sort of confusion and he mingles them without distinguishing them; then as it were separating them a little and holding them away from him and distinguishing them he perceives being, motion, and rest, three and each of them one. Does he not then say that they are different from each other and distinguish them in otherness, and see the otherness in being when he posits three terms, each of them one? Again, when he brings them back to unity and sees them in a unity, all one, does he not collect them into sameness and, as he looks at them, see that sameness has come to be and is? So we must add these two, *the*

same and *the other,* to those first three, so that there will be in all five kinds: the last two give to subsequent things the characters of being other and same; for each individual thing is a particular "same" and a particular "other"; ("same" and "other" without the "particular" apply to the universal kinds). These are primary kinds, because you cannot apply any predicate to them which forms part of the definition of their essence. You will certainly predicate being of them, for they exist, but not as their genus or kind, for they are not particular beings; nor can you predicate being as the genus of motion and rest, for they are not species of being. (Some things exist as species of being, others as participating in being.) Nor does being participate in these other primary kinds as if they were genera of which it was a species, for they do not rise to the level of being and are not prior to it.

VI. 2. 21

[How *Nous* is many as well as one: we find number in the infinite extent of its powers, quality in its glorious beauty, quantity in the continuity of its activity; and from these with the help of the great Categories of Sameness and Otherness (see VI. 2. 8) all the multiplicity of intelligible beings can be derived.]

How then does *Nous,* remaining one in its essential structure, produce particular beings? This is the same as asking how from those four primary kinds (Motion, Rest, Sameness, and Otherness) the things which we call subsequent proceed. Well, then, see how in this great, this tremendous *Nous,* not full of talk but full of thought, which is all things and a whole, not a particular individual mind, all things which come from it are present. It certainly has number in the things which it sees; it is one and many, and the many are its powers, wonderful powers, not weak, but because they are pure the greatest of powers, fresh and full of life and truly powers, without any limit to their action; so there we see the infinite, infinity and greatness. Then when you see existing in it in the way proper to *Nous* this greatness, along with the beauty which there is in it of its essence and the glory and the light

around it, you see quality already in bloom on it; and with the continuity of its activity you see extension, quietly at rest, appearing to your gaze. This gives you one, two, three things, extension and universal quantity being the third. And when you see quantity and quality in it, both tending to one and in a way becoming one, then observe figure appearing. Then otherness comes in and separates quantity and quality, and you have differences of figures and other qualities: and sameness, which is there as well, makes equality exist, otherness inequality in quantity, number, and size, and from these derive circles and squares and figures with unequal sides, and like and unlike numbers, odd and even. For since *Nous* is intelligent life and activity without imperfection, it leaves out none of the things which we now find to be works of intelligence; it contains all things in its power, possessing them as realities and in the manner proper to *Nous*. *Nous* possesses them as in thought, but not in discursive thought.

E

Soul

(*a*) *In its Relationship to* Nous

V. 9. 4

[There must be a principle before soul, because soul has an element of potentiality and changeability in it and needs an eternally actual cause to account for its existence; this cause is *Nous*.]

Why must we go higher than soul, instead of considering it as the first principle? First of all, *Nous* is other and better than soul, and the better comes first by nature. For it is not true, as people think, that "soul when it is made perfect produces intelligence": for what could make soul in potency come to be in act unless there was some cause to bring it to actuality? If it happened by chance, it would be possible for soul not to come to actual existence. So we must consider that the first realities are actual and self-sufficient and perfect: imperfect things are posterior to them and are perfected by their producers who, like fathers, bring to perfection what in the beginning they generated imperfect: the imperfect is matter in relation to the principle which makes it, and is perfected by receiving form. Further, if soul is passible, there must be something impassible (or everything will be destroyed by the passage of time), so there must be something before soul. And if soul is in the universe, there must be something outside the universe, and in this way too there must be something prior to soul. For since what is in the universe is in body and matter, nothing remains the same: so [if that was all that existed] man and all the *logoi* would not be eternal or continue the same. One can see from these and many other arguments that *Nous* must exist before soul.

IV. 1

[Souls exist in the world of *Nous*, in the state of unity proper to that world: but they have the capacity to de-

scend into the material world, where they are divided and separated spatially into different bodies: but even in this lower world they do not entirely lose their higher unity, but keep contact with the world of *Nous*.]

In the intelligible world is true being: *Nous* is the best of it. But there are souls There too; for it is from There that they come here. That world contains souls without bodies; this one, the souls which have come to be in bodies and are divided by their bodies. There all and every *Nous* is together, not separated or divided, and all souls are together in the one world, without spatial division. *Nous* then is always without separation and undivided. Soul There is not separated or divided; but it has a natural capacity for division. Its division is departure from the intelligible world and embodiment. So it is reasonably said to be "divisible as regards body," because it is in this way that it departs and is divided. How then is it also "undivided"? It does not all depart; there is something of it which does not come to this world, which is not divided. To say, then, that it consists of "the undivided and that which is divided in bodies" is the same as saying that it consists of that which is above and that which depends Thence, and reaches as far as the things of this world, like a radius from a centre. When it has come here it sees with the part of itself in which it preserves the nature of the whole. Even here below it is not only divided, but undivided as well: for the divided part of it is divided without division. It gives itself to the whole body and is undivided because it gives itself as a whole to the whole, and it is divided by being present in every part.

V. 3. 3–4

[We are not strictly speaking *Nous,* but soul, which is midway between *Nous* and sense-perception; in our normal life we are more closely connected with sense-perception; but we can become perfectly conformed to *Nous* by its own power, transcending our merely human nature, and then we do actually become *Nous* in a way.]

We are not *Nous;*[1] we are conformed to it by our primary reasoning power which receives it. Still, we perceive

through sense-perception, and it is we who perceive; surely we reason in the same way? It is certainly we ourselves who reason, and we ourselves who think the thoughts which are in our discursive understanding, for this is what we are. But the activities of *Nous* come from above, just as those proceeding from sense-perception come from below. *We* are the chief part of the soul, in the middle between two powers, a worse and a better, the worse being that of sense-perception and the better that of *Nous*. But it is generally agreed that sense-perception is continually our own possession; for we perceive continually: there is doubt about *Nous,* both because we are not always in touch with it and because it is separable. It is separable because it does not incline to us, but rather we to it when we look upwards. Sense-perception is our messenger: *Nous* is our king.

Yet we are kings too when we are conformed to it. We are conformed to it in two ways, either by a sort of inscription, as if its laws were written in us, or by being filled with it and able to see it and be aware of its presence. And we know that we ourselves come to know other things by means of this vision of *Nous*. We either come to know the power which knows it by that power itself, or we ourselves become that vision. So the man who knows himself is double: there is the one who knows the nature of discursive reasoning, which belongs to soul, and there is the other who transcends the first one and knows himself according to *Nous* by becoming it: by it he thinks himself, not as man any longer, but as having become something completely different and as having carried himself off to the heights, bringing along with him only the better part of the soul, which alone can take wing to intuitive intellect, so that he can establish There what he saw. Does not the discursive reason know that it is discursive reason, that it gains understanding of things outside, and makes its judgments by the rules in itself which it has from *Nous,* and that there is something better than itself, which it does not seek but altogether possesses? But is there anything which it does not know when it knows what sort of a thing it is, and what its effects are like? If

then discursive reason says that it comes from *Nous* and is second after *Nous* and the image of *Nous,* and has in itself all the characters which *Nous* has written and continues to write in it, will someone who knows himself like this stop at this point? Is it by using another extra power that we have the vision of *Nous* which knows itself, or do we share in *Nous,* since it is ours and we belong to it, and so know *Nous* and ourselves? This last must be the way if we are to know whatever it is in *Nous* that knows itself. A man becomes a *Nous* when he puts away all the rest of himself and sees only this by means of this, himself by means of himself. Then he sees himself as *Nous* sees itself.

V. 3. 7

[Soul is directed to and is like *Nous* in its inward part; but even in that part of it which is directed to the outside world, and in its external activities, it keeps a sort of likeness to *Nous.*]

Once again, then, *Nous* is a self-contained activity, but soul has what we may call an inward part, which is that of it which is directed to *Nous,* and a part outside *Nous* which is directed to the outside world. By the one it is made like that from which it came, by the other, even though it has been made unlike, it becomes like, here below too, both in its action and its production. For even while it is active it contemplates, and when it produces it produces Forms (a kind of completed acts of intellect). So all things are traces of thought and *Nous;* they proceed according to their original pattern; those which are near imitate *Nous* better, and the remotest keep an obscure image of it.

V. 3. 8

[The soul is illuminated by *Nous;* and, being so illuminated, is raised to its level and becomes an image of it.]

This light [of *Nous*] shines in the soul and illumines it: that is, it makes it intelligent: that is, it makes it like itself, the light above. You will come near to the nature of *Nous* and its content if you think of something like the trace of

this light which is present in the soul, but still fairer and greater. For it is this illumination which gives the soul a clearer life, not, however, a generative life; on the contrary, it turns the soul to itself and does not allow it to scatter itself abroad, but makes it love the glory in *Nous*. It is not the life of sense-perception either, for this looks outwards, to the external world where its particular activity lies. But one who has received that light from true being looks, we may say, not particularly at visible things but just the opposite. It remains, then, that he must have received an intellectual life, a trace of the life of *Nous*: for true being is There.

The life in *Nous* is also activity, the first light which lightens itself first of all and shines turned towards itself, at once enlightening and enlightened, the truly intelligible, thinking and thought, seen by itself and needing no other to enable it to see, sufficing to itself for seeing; for it is itself what it sees. It is known to us too by its very self; through itself the knowledge of it comes to us. Otherwise, from where should we get the means to speak of it? It is of such a nature that it grasps itself more clearly, and our apprehension is by means of it. By reasonings of this kind our soul is led back to it, by considering itself to be an image of *Nous* and its life a trace and likeness of *Nous*, and that whenever it thinks it becomes godlike and *Nous*-like. If anyone asks it what sort of thing is that perfect and universal *Nous*, the primary self-knower, the soul first of all enters into *Nous* or makes room for its activity; then it shows itself to be in possession of the things in *Nous* of which it holds in itself the memory, and, by means of its own likeness to *Nous* is able somehow to see it, being brought to a more exact resemblance as far as any part of the soul can come to resemble *Nous*.

VI. 4. 3

[*Nous* is fully immanent and transcendent: the (common Hellenistic) idea of "presence by powers" does not really apply to spiritual being: where the "power" is present, the being is present as a whole, but the recipient

only receives as much as it is able; the soul is present in the body in the same sort of way.]

Shall we say that it [the All, or Real Being, i.e. *Nous*] is present, or that it remains by itself, but powers go out from it to all things, and so it is present everywhere? In this way they say that souls are a sort of rays; the All remains established in itself, and the souls are sent out, each to a corresponding living being. Now in things which do not preserve the whole nature of the One Being as it is in itself, only a power of it is present where it is present; yet this certainly does not mean that it is not wholly present, since even in this case it is not cut off from the power which it gave to the other thing: but the recipient was only able to take a certain limited amount, though all was there. Where all its powers are present, it is clearly present itself, though at the same time separate: for if it became the form of a particular thing it would cease to be all and to exist everywhere in itself (though being incidentally the form of something else too). But since it belongs to no one particular thing, when something wants to belong to it, if it wishes it draws near to it, as much as is possible, but does not become the property of that or any other thing but remains the object of its desire. There is nothing surprising in it thus being present in all things, because it is in none of them in such a way as to belong to them. So perhaps it is not unreasonable to say that the soul has the same sort of relationship of accidental sympathy with the body, if we say that it remains by itself and does not become the property of matter or body, but the whole body is illumined by it in every one of its parts.

(*b*) *In its Activity in the Sense-world*

IV. 3. 9

[Soul's "entry" into body. Universal Soul does not really enter body, but timelessly illuminates and informs it, remaining itself unchanged and unmoved, at once immanent and transcendent. Body is really in Soul, not Soul in body.]

But we must inquire how soul comes to be in body, how and in what way. This too is a subject worth wondering about and inquiring into. There are two ways of soul entering body; one is when a soul is already in a body and changes bodies, or passes from a body of air or fire to one of earth (people do not call this change of body—*metensomatosis*—because the body from which entry is made is not apparent); and the other passage from bodilessness to any kind of body, which is the first communication of soul with body. About this last it will be proper to investigate what it is that happens when a soul which is altogether pure and free from body takes upon itself a bodily nature. We should perhaps, or rather must, begin with the Soul of the All: and when talking about the Soul of the All we must consider that the terms "entry" and "ensoulment" are used in the discussion for the sake of clear explanation. For there never was a time when this universe did not have a soul, or when body existed in the absence of soul, or when matter was not set in order: [1] but in discussing these things one can consider them apart from each other. When one is reasoning about any kind of composite thing it is always legitimate to analyse it in thought into its parts.

The truth is as follows. If body did not exist, soul would not go forth, since there is no place other than body where it is natural for it to be. But if it intends to go forth it will produce a place for itself, and so a body. Soul's rest is, we may say, confirmed in Absolute Rest; a great light shines from it, and at the outermost edge of this firelight there is a darkness. Soul sees this darkness and informs it, since it is there as a substrate for form. For it was not lawful for that which borders on soul to be without its share of *logos,* as far as that was capable of receiving it, of which the phrase was used "dimly in dimness." It is as if a fair and richly various house was built, which is not cut off from its architect, but he has not given it a share in himself either; he has considered it all, everywhere, worth a care which conduces to its very being and its excellence (as far as it can participate in being) but does him no harm in his presiding over it, for he rules it while abiding above. It is

in this sort of way that it is ensouled; it has a soul which does not belong to it but is present to it; it is mastered, not the master, possessed, not possessor. The universe lies in soul which bears it up, and nothing is without a share of soul. It is like a net in the waters, immersed in life, unable to make its own that in which it is. The sea is already spread out and the net spreads with it, as far as it can; for no one of its parts can be anywhere else than where it lies. And soul's nature is so great, just because it has no size, as to contain the whole of body in one and the same grasp; wherever body extends, there soul is. If body did not exist, it would make no difference to soul as regards size; for it is what it is. The universe extends as far as soul goes; its limit of extension is the point to which in going forth it has soul to keep it in being. The shadow is as large as the *logos* which comes from soul: and the *logos* is of such a kind as to make a size as large as the Form from which it derives wants to make.

IV. 4. 11

[The universe is a single living being, and soul rules it from within, not from outside, like nature in the process of healing, not like a doctor. Its wise guidance of the whole is a single, simple immanent activity, without reasoning or calculation.]

The administration of the universe is like that of a single living being, where there is one kind which works from outside and deals with it part by part and another kind which works from inside, from the principle of its life. So a doctor begins from outside and deals with particular parts, and is often baffled, and considers what to do, but nature begins from the principle of life and has no need of consideration. The administration and the administrator of the All must rule it, not after the manner of the doctor but like nature. The administration of the universe is much simpler, in that all things with which it deals are included as parts of a single living being. One nature rules all the natures; they come after it, depending on and from it, growing out of it, as the natures in branches grow out of that of the whole plant. What reason-

ing, then, can there be or reckoning or memory when wisdom is always present, active and ruling, ordering things always in the same way? One should not think that, because a great variety of different things comes to pass, that which produces them conforms to the changes of the product. The unchanging stability of the producer is in proportion to the variety of the products. For the things which happen according to nature in one single living being are many, and they do not all happen at once; there are the different ages and the growths which occur at particular times, for instance, of the horns or the beard; there is the prime of life and procreation; the previous *logoi* are not destroyed, but others come into operation as well. The underlying unity is clear, too, from the fact that the same *logos* which is in the parent, and the whole of it, is also in the offspring. So it is right to think that the same wisdom embraces both, and that this is the whole, abiding wisdom of the universe, manifold and varied and yet at the same time simple, belonging to a single mighty living being, not subject to change because of the multiplicity of things, but a single *logos,* everything at once: for if it was not everything, the wisdom would not be the wisdom of the universe but of later and partial things.

II. 3. 17–18

[It is the lowest phase of soul which makes material things; this it does without conscious thought, receiving the forms which it imprints from *Nous*. *Nous* is thus the ultimate creative principle of the material universe, which is the last and lowest of existences, but necessary to the perfection of the whole: even the evil in it is part of the pattern, and contributes to that perfection.]

Are these *logoi* which are in soul thoughts? But then how will it make things in accordance with these thoughts? For it is in matter that the *logos* makes things, and that which makes on the level of nature is not thought or vision, but a power which manipulates matter, which does not know but only acts, like an impression or a figure in water, a circle, say; another gives it what is required for this activity of making in the sphere of growth and gen-

eration. If this is so, the ruling principle of the soul will make by nourishing the generative soul in matter. Will it then nourish it as the result of having reasoned? If it reasons, it will first refer to something else, or to what it has in itself. But if it refers to what it has in itself, there is no need of reasoning. For it is not reasoning that nourishes, but the part of soul which possesses the *logoi:* for this is more powerful and able to make in soul. It makes, then, according to Forms: that is, it must give what it receives from *Nous*. *Nous* gives to the Soul of the All, and Soul (the one which comes next after *Nous*) gives to the soul next after it,[2] enlightening and informing it, and this last soul immediately makes, as if under orders. It makes some things without hindrance, but in others, the worse ones, it meets obstruction. Since its power to make is derived, and it is filled with *logoi* which are not the original ones, it does not simply make according to the Forms which it has received, but contributes something of its own, and this is obviously worse. Its product is a living being, but a very imperfect one, which makes its own life difficult since it is the worst of living things, ill-conditioned and savage, made of inferior matter, a sort of sediment of the prior realities, bitter and embittering. This is the lowest soul's contribution to the universal Whole.

Then are the evils in the All necessary, because they follow on the prior realities? Rather because if they did not exist the All would be imperfect. Most of them, even all of them, contribute something useful to the Whole—poisonous snakes do, for instance—though generally the reason why they exist is obscure. Even moral evil itself has many advantages and is productive of much excellence, for example, all the beauty of art, and rouses us to serious thought about our way of living, not allowing us to slumber complacently. If this is correct, it must be that the Soul of the All contemplates perfection, always aspiring to the intelligible nature and to God, and that when it is full, filled right up to the brim, its trace, its last and lowest expression, is this productive principle that we are discussing. This then is the ultimate maker; over it is that part of soul which is primarily filled from *Nous;* over all

is *Nous* the Craftsman,[3] who gives to the Soul which comes next those gifts whose traces are in the third. This visible universe, then, is properly called an image always in process of making; its first and second principles are at rest, the third at rest too, but also in motion, incidentally and in matter. As long as *Nous* and Soul exist, the *logoi* will flow into this lower form of Soul, just as, as long as the sun exists, all its rays will shine from it.

III. 8. 4

[The dream-like contemplation of Nature (the Lower Soul), which produces the material universe: all action springs from contemplation.]

If anyone asked Nature why it makes, if it cared to hear and answer the questioner it would say, "You ought not to ask, but to understand in silence, you too, just as I am silent and not in the habit of talking. And what are you to understand? That what comes into being is what I see, a silent contemplation, the vision proper to my nature, and that I, originating from this sort of contemplation have a contemplative nature, and my act of contemplation makes what it sees, as the geometers draw their figures while they contemplate. But I do not draw, but as I contemplate the lines which bound bodies come to be as if they fell from my contemplation. What happens to me is the same as what happens to my mother and the beings that begot me. They too derive from contemplation, and it is no action of theirs which brings about my birth: they are greater *logoi,* and as they contemplate themselves I come to be."

What does this mean? That what is called Nature is a soul, the offspring of a prior soul with a stronger life; that it quietly holds contemplation in itself, not directed upwards or even downwards, but at rest in what it is, in its own repose and a kind of self-perception, and in this consciousness and self-perception it sees what comes after it, as far as it can, and seeks no longer, but has accomplished a vision of splendour and delight. If anyone wants to attribute to it understanding or perception, it will not be the understanding or perception we speak of in other beings;

it will be like comparing consciousness in dreams to waking consciousness.

Nature is at rest in contemplation of the vision of itself, a vision which comes to it from its abiding in and with itself and being itself vision. Its contemplation is silent but somewhat blurred. There is another contemplation clearer for sight, and of this Nature is the image. For this reason what is produced by it is weak in every way, because a weak contemplation produces a weak object. Men too, when their power of contemplation weakens, make action a shadow of contemplation and reasoning. Because contemplation is not enough for them, since their souls are weak and they are not able to grasp the vision sufficiently, and therefore are not filled with it, but still long to see it, they are carried into action so as to see what they cannot see with their intellect. When they make something, then, it is because they want to see their object themselves and also because they want others to be aware of it and contemplate it, when their project is realized in practice as well as possible. Everywhere we shall find that making and action are either a weakening or a consequence of contemplation; a weakening if the doer or maker had nothing in view beyond the thing done; a consequence, if he had another prior object of contemplation better than what he made. For who, when he is able to contemplate that which is truly real, deliberately goes after its image? Dull children, too, are evidence of this, who are incapable of learning and contemplative studies and turn to crafts and manual work.

III. 8. 5

[The activity of the higher Soul and the emanation of Nature from it. Unity of contemplation and action in every phase of the soul's activity.]

In speaking of Nature we have seen in what way its generative activity is contemplation. Now, going on to the Soul prior to Nature, we should say how its contemplation, its love of learning and spirit of inquiry, its birth-pangs from the knowledge it attains and its fullness make it, when it has itself become all a vision, produce another

vision: just as when a particular art is complete it produces a kind of another little art in a child who is being taught it, who possesses a trace of everything in it. But all the same, the visions, the objects of contemplation of this lower world are dim and helpless sorts of things at first.

The rational part of soul then, that which is above and filled and illuminated from the reality above remains There; but that which participates in it in virtue of the first participation [of Soul in *Nous*] goes forth continually, life from life. The activity of soul reaches everywhere, and there is no point where it fails. But in going forth it lets the prior part of itself remain where it left it; for if it abandoned its former position it would no longer be everywhere, but only at the last point it reached. But what goes forth is not equal to what remains. If then it must come to be everywhere, and there must be nowhere without its activity; and if the prior must always be different from that which comes after; and if the activity of soul originates from contemplation or action, and action does not exist at this stage (for it cannot come before contemplation); then all activity of soul must be contemplation, but one stage weaker than another. So what appears to be action according to contemplation is really the weakest form of contemplation: for that which is produced must always be of the same kind as its producer, but weaker through losing its virtue as it comes down.

All goes on quietly, for there is no need of any obvious and external contemplation or action; it is Soul which contemplates, and makes that which comes after it, that which contemplates in a more external way and not like that which precedes it; contemplation makes contemplation. Contemplation and vision have no limits; this is why soul makes, and makes everywhere (where does it not?) since the same vision is in every soul. For it is not spatially limited. It is of course not present in exactly the same way in every soul, since it is not even the same in every part of the soul. That is why "the charioteer gives the horses what he sees," [4] and they in taking it made clear that they longed for what they saw; for they did not get it

all. And if in their longing they act, they act for the sake of what they long for: and that is vision and contemplation.

IV. 4. 14

[The forms in body, which make bodily things what they are, are distinct from Nature, a kind of external irradiation or warming proceeding from it; they mark the very last stage in the evolution of reality.]

As for the bodies which are said to be produced by Nature, the elements are just precisely products of Nature: but are the animals and plants so disposed as to have Nature present in them? Their relationship to Nature is like that of air to light; when light goes away air holds nothing of it; light is separate from air and air from light, and they do not mingle. Or it is like that of fire and the warmed body, when if fire goes away a warmth remains which is distinct from the warmth in the fire and is an affection of the warmed body. In the same way the shape which Nature gives to the formed body must be considered as another form, distinct from Nature itself.

The order and unity of the visible universe

V. 8. 7

[The visible universe comes into being as a whole; it is not planned and then made part by part but proceeds without thought or effort from the world of *Nous*.]

As for this All, if we agree that its being and its being what it is come to it from another, are we to think that its maker conceived earth in his own mind, with its necessary place in the centre, and then water and its place upon earth, and then the other elements in their order up to heaven, then all living things, each with the sort of shapes which they have now, and their particular internal organs and outward parts, and then when he had them all arranged in his mind proceeded to his work? Planning of this sort is quite impossible. For where could the ideas of all these things come from to one who had never seen them? And if he received them from someone else he

could not carry them out as craftsmen do now, using their hands and tools; for hands and feet come later. The only possibility that remains, then, is that all things exist in something else, and, since there is nothing between because of their closeness to something else in the realm of real being, an imprint and image of that other suddenly appears, either by its direct action or through the assistance of soul (this makes no difference for the present discussion), or of a particular soul. All that is here below comes from There, and exists in greater beauty There: for here it is adulterated, but There it is pure. All this universe is occupied by forms from beginning to end; matter first of all by the forms of the elements, and then other forms upon these, and then again others; so that it is difficult to find the matter hidden under so many forms. Then matter too is a sort of ultimate form; [5] so this universe is all form, and all the things in it are forms: for its archetype is form: the making is done without noise and fuss, since that which makes is all real being and form. So this is another reason why the visible universe is fashioned without toil and trouble: and it is an All that makes, so an All is made. There is nothing to hinder the making; even now it has the mastery, and, though one thing obstructs another, nothing obstructs it: for it abides as an All.

II. 9. 8

[The visible universe is not, as the Gnostics think, evil, an unfortunate mistake, the product of some sinful affection or arbitrary whim of a spiritual being; it is the perfect image of the Intelligible World of *Nous,* and it is necessary that it should exist; and within it, as against both Gnostic and Orthodox Christian beliefs, the star-gods are more perfect and closer to the world of *Nous* than human beings.]

For if this All has come into life in such a way that its life is not a disjointed one—like the smaller things in it which by its fullness of life it produces continually night and day—but coherent and vigorous, a great universal life showing infinite wisdom, how should one not call it a clear and fine image of the intelligible gods? If, being an image,

it is not that intelligible world, this is precisely what is natural to it; if it was the intelligible world it would not be an image of it. But it is false to say that it is an image unlike the original; nothing has been left out which it was possible for a fine image in the order of nature to have. The image has to exist, necessarily, not as the result of thought and contrivance: the intelligible could not be the last, for it has to have a double activity, one in itself and one directed to something else. There must then be something after it, for only that which is the most powerless of all things has nothing below it. But There a wonderful power runs, and so besides its inward activity it produces.

If there is another universe better than this one, then what is this one? But if there must be a universe which preserves the image of the intelligible world, and there is no other, then this is that universe.

The whole earth is full of varied living creatures and immortal beings; everything up to the sky is full of them. Why, then, are not the stars, both those in the lower spheres and those in the highest, gods moving in order, circling the universe? Why should not they possess virtue? What hindrance prevents them from acquiring it? The causes are not present there which make people bad here below, and there is no badness of body, disturbed and disturbing. And why should they not have understanding, in their everlasting peace, and comprehend with their intellect God and the intelligible gods? Shall our wisdom be greater than theirs? Who, if he has not gone mad, could tolerate the idea?

II. 3. 7

[Why do the stars, and omens in general, announce the future? Why is divination possible? Because the whole universe is a single living being, with a unified organic structure; and so from signs appearing in one member we can divine what is going to happen to another.]

But if these heavenly powers give signs of things to come—as we maintain that many other things also do—what might the cause be? How does the order work? There would be no signifying if particular things did not happen

according to some order. Let us suppose that the stars are like characters always being written on the heavens, or written once for all and moving as they perform other tasks as well as their principal one: and let us assume that their significance results from this, just as because of the one principle in a single living being, by studying one member we can learn something else about a different one. For instance, we can come to conclusions about someone's character, and also about the dangers that beset him and the precautions to be taken, by looking at his eyes or some other part of his body. Yes, they are members and so are we, different things in different ways. All things are filled full of signs, and it is a wise man who can learn about one thing from another. Yet, all the same, many processes of learning in this way are customary and known to all.

Then what is the single linked order? If there is one, our auguries from birds and other living creatures, by which we predict particular events, are reasonable. All things must be joined to one another; not only must there be in each individual thing what has well been termed "a single, united breath of life," but before them, and still more, in the All. One principle must make the universe a single complex living creature, one from all; and just as in individual organisms each member undertakes its own particular task, so the members of the All, each individual one of them have their individual work to do; this applies even more to the All than to particular organisms, in so far as the members of it are not merely members, but wholes and more important than the members of particular things. Each one goes forth from one single principle and does its own work, but they also co-operate one with another; for they are not cut off from the whole. They act on and are affected by others; one comes up to another, bringing it pain or pleasure. The process has nothing random or casual about it.

IV. 4. 33

[The great dance of the universe.]

The movement of the universe is not casual, but goes

according to the *logos* of its living organism; there must therefore be a harmony of action and experience, and an order which arranges things together, adapting them and bringing them into due relation with each other, so that according to every figure of the universal movement there is a different disposition of the things which it governs, as if they were performing a single ballet in a rich variety of dance-movements. In our ballets, too, there is no need to mention, since they are obvious, the external elements which play their part in the performance, the way in which piping and singing and everything else which joins in contributing to the total effect, change variously at every movement. But the parts of the dancer's body, too, cannot possibly keep the same position in every figure; his limbs bend as they follow the pattern; one is borne down, another up, one works hard and painfully, another is given rest as the figuring changes. The dancer's intention looks elsewhere; his limbs are affected in accordance with the dance and serve the dance, and help to make it perfect and complete: and the connoisseur of ballet can say that to fit a particular figure one limb is raised, another bent together, one is hidden, another degraded; the dancer does not choose to make these movements for no reason, but each part of him as he performs the dance has its necessary position in the dancing of the whole body.[6]

IV. 4. 36

[The immense variety of the visible universe, which is a living whole made up of parts all of which have life in them, even if we do not perceive it.]

The All is full of the richest variety; all *logoi* are present in it and an unbounded store of varied powers. It is like what they say about man, that the eye and each of the bones has its own distinctive power, the bones of the hand one power and the toe-bone another; there is no part which has not a power, and one different from every other —but we know nothing about it, unless we have studied this sort of subject. The All is like this, but even more so, because the parts of our bodies with their powers are only traces of the parts and powers of the universe. In the All

there is an indescribably wonderful variety of powers, especially in the bodies which move through the heavens. For it did not have to come to be an ordered universe like a soulless house, even if a large and complex one, made of materials easy to reckon up according to kind, stones and timber, perhaps, and other things of the sort; but it exists, all awake and alive differently in different parts, and nothing can exist which does not belong to it. This then solves the difficulty of how there can be anything without soul in an ensouled living being: for this account explains that different things in the Whole live in different ways, but we do not say that anything is alive which does not move itself perceptibly: but each thing of this sort has a hidden life; and the thing which is perceptibly alive is composed of parts which are not perceptibly alive but contribute wonderful powers to the life of a living thing of this kind. Man would not have been moved to such great achievements if the powers in himself from which he started had been without soul, nor would the All live as it does if each particular thing in it did not live its own life—even if the All does not exercise deliberate choice. For it acts without need of deliberate choice; it is of older birth than choice.

IV. 4. 40

[Magic is possible because of the universal sympathy which binds all parts of the cosmos together; prayer too to the star-gods and other powers which rule the universe attains its effect magically and automatically through this sympathy.]

How do magic spells work? By sympathy, and by the natural concord of things that are alike and opposition of things that are different, and by the rich variety of the many powers which go to make up the life of the one Living Creature. For many things are drawn and enchanted without any other contrivance. The true magic is the "Love and Strife" [7] in the All. This is the primary wizard and enchanter, from observing whom men come to use philtres and spells on each other. For because desire is natural and things that cause desire attract each other, there has grown

up an art of attraction by desire through magic, used by those who add by magic touches various natures designed to draw different people together and with a force of desire implanted in them: they join one soul to another, as if they were training together plants that grow in different places. They use as well figures with power in them, and by putting themselves into the right postures they quietly bring powers upon their patients through their participation in the unity of the universe. For if anyone put a magician outside the All, he could not draw or bring down by attractive or binding spells. But now, because he does not operate as if he were somewhere else, he can work with a knowledge of where one thing is drawn to another in the Living Creature. And the soul too is naturally drawn by the tune of a magic chant or a particular intonation or posture of the magician—for these things attract, as pitiable figures and voices attract: for it is not the will or reason which is charmed by music, but the irrational soul, and this kind of magic causes no surprise; people even like being enchanted, if this is not actually what they demand from the musicians. And we must not think that other kinds of prayers either are freely and deliberately answered. For people charmed by spells do not act with free deliberation, nor, when a snake fascinates a man, does the man understand or perceive what is happening, but he knows only afterwards that he has had the experience; his ruling intellect, however, remains unaffected. When a man prays to anything, some influence comes from it upon him or upon another: the sun, or another star, does not hear his prayer.

III. 2. 2

[From the unity of *Nous* proceeds the conflicting diversity of the visible universe, in which the principle of unity manifests itself by bringing about a harmony of contending opposites.]

It is like the *logos* in a seed, in which all the parts are together in identity; no one part fights another or differs from it or gets in its way; then it acquires mass and differ-

ent parts come to be in different places, and they get in each other's way, and one consumes another: in the same way this universe has arisen and developed in separation of parts from one *Nous* and the *Logos*[8] which proceeds from it; and of necessity some parts develop friendly and kind, others hostile and inimical; willingly or unwillingly they injure each other, and they bring each other's birth by their own destruction: yet all the same parts like this, in their action on and experience of each other, bring into being a single concord, as each utters its own notes; and the *Logos* over them makes a concord, a single order for the whole.

III. 2. 9

[Our own part in the universal order; we remain free and responsible, and the wicked cannot expect gods or good men to help them escape the consequences of their actions.]

Providence cannot exist in such a way as to make us nothing. If everything was Providence and nothing but Providence, then Providence would not exist; for what would It have to provide for? There would be nothing but the Divine. The Divine exists as things are, and comes forth to something other than Itself, not to destroy that other, but to preside over it. With man, for instance, It sees to it that he is man, that is, that he lives by the law of Providence, which means doing everything that that law says. And it says that those who become good shall have a good life, now, and laid up in store for them hereafter as well, and the wicked the opposite. It is not lawful for those who have become wicked to demand others to be their saviours and to sacrifice themselves in answer to their prayers; [9] or to require gods to direct their affairs in detail, laying aside their own life, or good men, who live another life better than human rule, to become their rulers.

III. 2. 17

[The imperfect unity of the visible world means that there must necessarily be a place in it for moral evil. But

this does not excuse the wicked, for they are souls who exist before they came into this world, and they bring their own characters and dispositions to the play of life. The *Logos* only allots them appropriate parts.]

The nature of the *Logos* corresponds to its whole productive activity, and, therefore, the more it is dispersed the more opposed will its products be: so the universe of sense is less a unity than its *Logos*; it is more of a manifold and there is more opposition in it: and each individual in it will be urged by a greater desire to live and a greater passion for unity.

But passionate desires often destroy their objects, if they are perishable, in the pursuit of their own good: and the part straining towards the whole draws to itself what it can.

So we have good and wicked men, like the opposed movements of a dancer inspired by one and the same art: we shall call one part of his performance "good" and one "wicked" and say that its excellence lies in the opposition.

But then the wicked are no longer wicked?

No: they remain wicked, only their being like that does not originate with themselves.

But surely this excuses them?

No; excuse depends on the *Logos*, and the *Logos* does not make us disposed to excuse this sort of people. But if one part of the *Logos* is a good man, another a bad—and the bad are the larger class—it is like the production of a play: the author gives each actor a part, but also makes use of the characters which they have already. He does not himself rank them as leading actor or second or third, but gives each one suitable words and by that assignment fixes his proper rank.[10]

So every man has his place, a place to fit the good man and one to fit the bad. Each kind of man, then, goes according to nature, and the *Logos* to the place that suits him, and holds the position he has chosen. There one speaks blasphemies and does crimes, the other speaks and acts in all goodness: for the actors existed before this play and bring their own proper selves to it.

Time and eternity

III. 7. 11

[Time is the life of the soul in movement, when it goes out from its rest in the world of *Nous* to form the restless succession of the universe in which we live: eternity is the unmoving unbounded life of the world of *Nous*.]

We must return to the disposition which we said existed in eternity, to that quiet life, all a single whole, unbounded, altogether without divergence, resting in and directed towards unity. Time did not yet exist, not at any rate for the beings of that world; we shall produce time by means of the form and nature of what comes later. If, then, these beings were at rest in themselves, "how did time first come out?" We could hardly, perhaps, call on the Muses, who did not then yet exist, to tell us this; but we might perhaps (even if the Muses did exist then after all) ask time when it has come into being to tell us how it did come into being and appear. It might say something like this about itself: that before, when it had not yet in fact produced this "before" or felt the need of what comes after, it was at rest with it in real being; it was not yet time, but itself, too, kept quiet in the reality [of *Nous*]. But since there was a restlessly active nature which wanted to control itself and be on its own, and chose to seek for more than its present state, this moved and time moved with it: and so, always moving on to what comes after and is not the same, but one thing after another, we made a long stretch of our journey and constructed time as an image of eternity. For because Soul had an unquiet power, which wanted to keep on transferring what it saw There to somewhere else, it did not want the whole to be present to it all together; and as from a quiet seed the *logos*, unfolding itself, advances, as it thinks, to largeness, but does away with the largeness by division and, instead of keeping its unity in itself, squanders it outside itself and so goes forward to a weaker extension; in the same way Soul, making the world of sense in imitation of that other world, moved with a motion which was not that which exists There, but like it, and

intending to be an image of it, first of all put itself into time, which it made instead of eternity, and then handed over that which came into being as a slave to time, by making the whole of it exist in time and encompassing all its ways with time. For since the world of sense moves in Soul—this universe has no other place than Soul—it moves also in the time of Soul. For as Soul presents one activity after another, and then again another in ordered succession, it produces the succession along with the activity, and goes on with another thought coming after that which it had before, to that which did not previously exist because discursive thought was not in action and Soul's present life is not like that which came before it. For a different kind of life goes with having a different kind of time. So the spreading out of life involves time; life's continual progress involves continuity of time, and life which is past involves past time. So would it be sense to say that time is the life of soul in a movement of passage from one way of life to another? Yes, for if eternity is life at rest, unchanging and identical and already unbounded, and time must exist as an image of eternity[11] (in the same relation as that in which this universe stands to the world of *Nous*), then we must say that there is another life having, in a way of speaking, the same name as this power of the soul, and, instead of the motion of *Nous,* that there is the motion of a part of Soul; and, instead of sameness and self-identity and abiding, that which does not abide in the same but does one act after another; and, instead of that which is one without distance or separation, an image of unity, one by continuity; and, instead of a complete unbounded whole, a continuous unbounded succession and, instead of a whole all together, a whole which is and always will be going to come into being part by part. For this is the way in which it will imitate that which is already a whole, already all together and unbounded, by intending to be always making an increase in its being: for this is how its being will imitate the being of *Nous*. But one must not conceive time as outside Soul, any more than eternity There as outside Real Being. It is not a consequence of Soul, something that comes after (any more than eternity

There) but something which is seen along with it and exists in it and with it, as eternity does There with Real Being.

Matter and evil

III. 6. 7

[Matter, Plotinus has just said, is not body or soul or mind or life or form or limit or potency. He proceeds to describe its essential falseness and unreality, its phantasmal character, and that of the material things which are formed in it.]

Matter falls outside all these categories, and cannot even rightly be spoken of as being. It could appropriately be called non-being; not in the sense in which movement or rest are not being, but truly non-being. It is a ghostly image of bulk, a tendency towards substantial existence; it is at rest, but not in any resting-place; it is invisible in itself and escapes any attempt to see it, and appears when one is not looking; even if you look closely you cannot see it. It always has opposite appearances in itself, small and great, less and more, deficient and superabundant, a phantom which does not remain, and cannot get away either: for it has no strength even for this, since it has not received strength from *Nous* but is lacking in all being. Whatever announcement it makes, therefore, is a lie. If it appears great, it is small, if more, it is less: its apparent being is not real, but a sort of fleeting frivolity. Hence the things which seem to come into being in it are frivolities, nothing but phantoms in a phantom, like something in a mirror which really exists in one place but is reflected in another. It seems to be filled but holds nothing; it is all seeming. "Imitations of real beings pass into and out of it," ghosts into a formless ghost, visible because of its formlessness. They seem to act on it, but do nothing, for they are wraith-like and feeble and have no thrust; nor does matter thrust against them, but they go through without making a cut, as if through water, or as if someone in a way projected shapes in the void people talk about.[12]

I. 8. 3

[The principle of evil is absolute formlessness as opposed to form, non-being as opposed to being, i.e. Matter.]

If being is of this kind, and also That beyond being, evil can be neither in being nor That beyond being, for they are good. It remains then that, granted that there is evil, it must be in the class of non-beings, existing as a sort of form of non-existence, and it must be found in one of the things which are mingled with non-being or have some sort of share in it. "Non-being" here of course does not mean "that which is absolutely non-existent" but only that which is other than being; not, however, non-being in the sense of a movement or position with regard to being, but in the sense of an image of being or even something still less real. This is either the world of sense as a whole and all that is experienced in it or something which comes later than this and is in a way incidental to it, or else its source or one of the things which help to complete its distinctive nature.

One might arrive at a conception of it by considering it as measurelessness opposed to measure, the unlimited as opposed to limit, formlessness as opposed to a forming principle, that which is always in need as opposed to self-sufficiency; as something always indefinite, nowhere at rest, affected by everything, insatiable, utter poverty: and by thinking that all this is not incidental to it but in a sort of way its substance, and that any part of it you see is by itself all this; and any other things which participate in it and are made like it become evil, though not essentially evil. What existence, then, has these characteristics, not as something distinct from it but as its very self? For if evil occurs incidentally in something else, it must first have some independent existence, even if it is not any sort of substance. For just as there is Absolute Good and good as a quality, there must be absolute evil and evil which occurs incidentally in something else as the result of the existence of absolute evil. But then how can measurelessness exist except in something unmeasured? Or measure except in something measured? But just as there does exist

a measure which is not in something measured, so there exists too a measurelessness which is not in the unmeasured. For if it exists in something else it must be in something unmeasured—but this will not need measurelessness if it is itself unmeasured—or in something measured: but that which is measured, in so far as it is measured, cannot contain measurelessness. So there must be something absolutely unlimited in itself, and formless, and with all the other distinguishing marks of the nature of evil mentioned before: and if there is anything evil besides this, either it has some of this in it or it is evil by regarding this or is a cause of evil. So that which underlies figures and forms and shapes and measures and limits and is decorated with ornaments that do not belong to it and has nothing good of its own, but is a phantasm as compared with reality and the substance of evil, if there really can be a substance of evil, has been discovered by our argument to be primal and absolute evil.

I. 8. 7

[A comment on some Platonic texts from the *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*:[13] evil must necessarily exist (i) because matter is necessary to the existence of the visible universe; (ii) because the process of outgoing or down-going from the Good must have a limit, and this limit is Matter, which has no good in it at all.]

But how then is it necessary that if the Good exists, so should the Bad? Is it because there must be matter in the All? This All [the visible universe] must certainly be composed of opposite principles: it would not exist at all if matter did not exist. "For the generation of this universe was a mixed result of the combination of intellect and necessity." What comes into it from God is good; the evil comes from the "ancient nature" (Plato means the underlying matter not yet set in order). But what does he mean by "moral nature," granted that "this place" refers to the All? The answer is given where he says, "Since you have come into being, you are not immortal, but you shall by no means be dissolved through me." If this is so, the statement is correct that "evils will never be done away with."

How then is one to escape? Not by movement in place, Plato says, but by winning virtue and separating oneself from the body: for in this way one separates oneself from matter as well, since the man who lives in close connexion with the body is also closely connected with matter. Plato himself explains somewhere about separating or not separating oneself: but being "among the gods" means "among the beings of the world of *Nous*"; for these are the immortals.

One can grasp the necessity of evil in this way too. Since not only the Good exists, there must be an ultimate limit to the process of going out past it, or, if one prefers to put it like this, going down or going away: and this last, after which nothing else can come into being, is the Bad. Now it is necessary that what comes after the First should exist, and therefore that the Last should exist; and this is matter, which possesses nothing at all of the Good. And in this way too the Bad is necessary.

II. 4. 5

[The difference between matter in the Intelligible World (the unformed living potency of Soul or *Nous*, turning in a timeless process to that which is above it to receive form) and the dead matter of the world of the senses.]

The bottom of each and every thing is matter; so all matter is dark, because light is the *logos* (and the intellect is *logos*). So intellect sees the *logos* in each thing, and considers that what is under it is dark because it lies below the light; just as the eye, which has the form of light, directs its gaze at the light and at colours (which are lights), and reports that what lies below the colours is dark and material, hidden by the colours. The darkness, however, in the Intelligible World differs from that in the world of sense, and so does the matter, just as much as the form superimposed on both is different. The divine matter when it receives that which defines it has a defined and intelligent life, but the matter of our world becomes something defined, but not alive or thinking, a decorated corpse. Shape here is only an image; so that which underlies it is also only an image. But There the shape is true

shape, and what underlies it is true too. So those who say that matter is substance must be considered to be speaking correctly if they are speaking of matter in the intelligible world. For that which underlies form There is substance, or rather, considered along with the form imposed upon it, makes a whole which is illuminated substance.

II. 4. 16 (end)

[Matter is absolutely evil because it is an absolute deficiency of good.]

Is matter then evil because it participates in good? Rather, because it lacks it; for this means that it does not have it. Anything which lacks something but has something else might perhaps hold a middle position between good and evil, if its lack and its having more or less balance: but that which has nothing because it is in want, or rather is want, must necessarily be evil. For it is not want of wealth but want of thought, want of virtue, of beauty, strength, shape, form, quality. Must it not then be ugly, utterly vile, utterly evil? But the matter There is something real, for That which is before it is beyond being. Here, however, that which is before matter is real, and so matter itself is not real; it is something else over against the excellence of real being.

I. 8. 15 (end)

[Matter, absolute Evil, never presents itself to us alone; it is always bound in, overlaid with Form, which is good.]

Because of the power and nature of Good, the Bad is not only bad; for it appears necessarily bound in a sort of beautiful fetters, as some prisoners are in chains of gold; and so it is hidden by them, in order that, though it exists, it may not be seen by the gods, and that men may be able not only to look at the Bad, but, even when they do look at it, may be in company with images of Beauty to remind them [of the true beauty of the Forms in the world of *Nous.*]

F

Our Selves

(*a*) *Their Foundation in* Nous *and Relationship to Universal Soul*

IV. 3. 5

[We remain ourselves in the world of *Nous*; our particular personalities at their highest are Intellect-Forms in *Nous,* distinct without separation and united without losing their individuality; on these our souls depend, being expressions of them on a lower and more divided level of being.]

But how will there still be one particular soul which is yours, one which is the soul of this particular man, and one which is another's? Are they the souls of particular individuals in the lower order, but belong in the higher order to that higher unity? But this will mean that Socrates will exist as long as Socrates' soul is in the body; but he will cease to be precisely when he attains to the very best. Now no real being ever ceases to be. The intellects There do not cease to be because they are not corporeally divided, but each remains distinct in otherness, having the same essential being.

So, too, souls depend in order on the several intellects. They are *logoi* of intellects, of which they are the further unfolding, having passed, we may say, from brevity to multiplicity. They are linked to the brevity of intellect by that in each of them which is least divided. They have already willed to be divided but cannot reach complete division; they keep identity and difference; each soul remains one, and all are one together. So we have given the sum of the discussion; the souls spring from one, and the many souls springing from one, like the intellects in *Nous,* are divided and not divided in the same way as these; the Soul which abides is a single *Logos* of *Nous,* and from it

spring partial *logoi,* which are immaterial, just as in the world of *Nous.*

VI. 4. 14

[Universal Soul is one-in-many; the individual souls in it are distinct but not separate, all springing from and remaining in a single principle.]

But if the same soul is everywhere, how can there be a particular soul of each individual? And how is one good and another bad? The one soul is sufficient to provide for individuals as well [as the whole], and contains all souls and all intellects. It is one and also unbounded, and contains all things together and each individual thing, distinct but not so distinguished as to be separate: otherwise how could it be unbounded? We speak of it as unbounded just because it contains all things together, every life and every soul and every intellect. Each one of them is not marked off from the others by boundaries; so in this way it is also one. It was not to have a single, but an unbounded life, and yet a single one too, single in this way, that all souls are together, not collected into a unity but springing from a unity and remaining in that from which they sprang; or rather they never did spring from it, but always were in this state, for nothing There comes into being, and so nothing is divided into parts; it is only the recipient who thinks that it is divided.

IV. 3. 4

[The problem of the unity of soul in connexion with the different kinds of relationship of soul to body; in the last resort it is the attitude, the degree and kind of concern with body, which determines, within the universal order, how far a soul is universal or limited, body-bound or transcending body.]

If the soul is one in this way, what are we to say in answer when anyone inquires about the consequences? The first difficulty he will raise will be, if a unity in this way simultaneously present in all things is possible; the next, what happens when Soul is in body, but a particular soul not? Perhaps the consequence will be that all soul is al-

ways in body, especially the Soul of the All: for it is not said to abandon the body, as ours is—though some people say that our soul will leave this particular body, but will never be completely out of body.[1] But, assuming that it is going to be completely out of body, how will one soul leave the body and another soul not, when they are the same? No such difficulty can hinder us where *Nous* is concerned, which is separated by differentiation into distinct parts which nevertheless remain together—for its substance is undivided. But with soul, which we speak of as divided among bodies, this unity of all souls presents many difficulties. Perhaps one might establish the unity as something existing independently, which does not fall into body, and then all the others, the Soul of the All and the rest, depending on it; they might be, in a way, united up to a point, one soul through not belonging to any particular thing, connected with the higher unity by their edges, united in their upper parts and striking out in different directions, like light on the earth dividing itself among the houses and not being split up, but remaining one just the same. The Soul of the All would always remain transcendent because it would have nothing to do with descent or the lower or a tendency towards the things here below, but our souls would come down because they would have their part marked off for them in this sphere, and by the turning to them of that which needs their care. The Soul of the All (that is, its lowest part) would be like the soul in a great growing plant, which directs the plant without effort or noise; our lower state would be as if there were maggots in a rotten part of the plant—for that is what the ensouled body is like in the All. The rest of our soul, which is of the same nature as the higher parts of Universal Soul, would be like a gardener concerned about the maggots in the plant and anxiously caring for it. Or it is as one might speak of a healthy man living with other healthy men as being at the service of his neighbours either in his action or his contemplation: and of a sick man, concerned with the care of his body, as being at the service of his body and belonging to it.

(*b*) *Higher and Lower Self*

VI. 4. 14-15

[The union of soul and body comes about through a drive of body towards ensoulment; there is a pre-established harmony between them.]

But we—who are we? Are we that higher self or that which drew near to it and came to be in time? Before this birth came to be we existed There as men different from those we are now, some of us even as gods, pure souls, intellect united with the whole of reality, parts of the world of *Nous,* not separated or cut off, belonging to the whole; and indeed we are not cut off even now. But now there has come to that higher man another man, wishing to exist and finding us; for we were not outside the universe. He wound himself round us and fastened himself to that man that each one of us was then (as if there was one voice and one word, and someone else came up from elsewhere, and his ear heard and received the sound and became an actual hearing, keeping that which made it actual present to it) and we became a couple, not just the one member of it we were before; and sometimes we become even the other member which we had fastened to us, when the first man is not active and in a different sense not present.

But how did that which came to us come? It had a certain fitness, and held to that which fitted it. It came into being capable of receiving soul; but what comes into being incapable of receiving all soul (though all soul is there, but not for it), like animals and plants, holds as much as it can take; so when a voice speaks a word with meaning, some hearers receive the meaning with the sound of the voice, others only the impact of the voice upon their ears. When a living creature is born, it has a soul present to it which comes from real being, by which it is attached to reality as a whole, and it has a body which is not empty, without a soul, and which was not placed, even before it came to life, in a soulless region; this body draws still nearer by its fitness for soul, and becomes, no longer merely a body, but a living body, and by a sort of prox-

imity acquires a trace of soul, not a piece of soul but a kind of warming or enlightenment coming from it; this causes the growth of desires and pleasures and pains. The body was certainly not something alien to the living creature which came into being.

IV. 4. 20

[Desire begins in the body; nature (the lower soul) takes it over and tries to bring it to its fulfilment; but the ultimate decision whether the desire shall be satisfied or not belongs to the higher soul.]

But why are there two desires? Why is it not only that qualified body which we have been discussing that desires? Because, if nature is one thing and the qualified body another which has come into being from nature (for nature exists before the qualified body comes into being, since it makes the qualified body, shaping and forming it), then nature cannot begin desire: the qualified body has particular experiences and feels pain in desiring the opposite of what it experiences, pleasure when it is suffering and sufficiency when it is in want: nature is like a mother, trying to make out the wishes of the sufferer and attempting to set it right and bring it back to herself; and, searching for the remedy, she attaches herself by her search to the desire of the sufferer, and the consummation of the desire passes from it to her. So one might say that the qualified body desires of its own accord, but nature desires as a result of, and because of, something else. And it is another soul which grants or withholds what is desired.

IV. 4. 18

[Body has a principle of life of its own, distinct both from the higher soul and the lower soul, or "nature," a "shadow" or "trace" of soul (the immanent form). This, in its aspiration to communion with soul, is the source of physical pain and pleasure.]

Then there is the question whether the body has anything of its own, any special characteristic which it possesses already when it lives by the presence of the soul, or whether what it has is nature, and this is what forms an

association with the body. The body which has soul and nature in it cannot be of the same kind as a lifeless thing; it must be like warmed air, not like illuminated air; it is the body of an animal or plant which has a sort of shadow of soul, and pain and the feeling of bodily pleasures are situated in the body qualified in this way: but the body's pain and this sort of pleasure result for us in dispassionate knowledge. When I say "for us," I am referring to the other soul. The qualified body does not belong to someone else, but is ours, and so we are concerned with it because it belongs to us. We are not it, nor are we clear of it; it depends upon and is attached to us. "We" means that which rules in us; the body is in a different way "ours," but ours all the same. So we are concerned with its pains and pleasures, more in proportion as we are weaker and do not separate ourselves, but consider the body the most honourable part of ourselves and the real man and, so to speak, sink ourselves in it. We must say that these sort of experiences of pain and pleasures do not belong to the soul at all, but to the qualified body and something intermediate and joint. For when something is one it is sufficient to itself; for example, what could body suffer if it was lifeless? Division would not affect it, but the unity in it. And soul by itself is not subject even to division, and when it is in this state [of separation] escapes everything. But when two things aspire to unity, since the unity which they have is an extraneous one, because their origin will not permit of their being really one, it is reasonable to expect that they will suffer pain. I do not mean "two" as if there were two bodies, for two bodies would have one and the same nature; but when one nature aspires to unite with another of a different kind, and the worse takes something from the better and cannot take it itself but only a trace of it, and so there come to be two things and one between what it is and what it cannot grasp, this makes difficulties for itself by acquiring a communion with the other which is hazardous and insecure, always borne from one extreme to the other. It is carried up and down, and as it comes down it proclaims its pain, as it goes up its longing for communion.

I. 1. 10

[When we speak of ourselves, we may mean by "we" either our souls alone or the joint entity made up of body and soul: the former is our true self.]

But if we are the soul, and we undergo these experiences, then it would be the soul that undergoes these experiences, and again it will be the soul which does what we do. Yes, but we said that what belongs to both [body and soul] is part of our selves, especially when we have not yet been separated from body: for we say that we experience what our body experiences. So "we" is used in two senses, either including the beast or referring to that which even in our present life transcends it. The beast is the body which has been given life. But the true man is different, clear of these experiences; he has the virtues which belong to the sphere of *Nous* and have their seat actually in the separate soul, separate and separable even while it is still here below. (For when it withdraws altogether, the lower soul which is illumined by it goes away too in its train.) But the virtues which result not from thought but from habit and training belong to that which is common to body and soul; for the vices belong to this, since envy and jealousy and emotional sympathy are located there. But which man does affection belong to? Some to the lower, some to the man within.

II. 9. 2

[There are three parts of our soul, one directed to the contemplation of *Nous* and the One, one concerned with body, and one intermediate; and our spiritual state depends on whether the intermediate part is attracted upwards or downwards.]

One part of our soul is always directed to *Nous* and the Father, another is concerned with the things of this world, and there is another between them. For the soul is one nature in a number of powers, and sometimes the whole of it is in harmony with the best part of itself (which is a part of Real Being), but sometimes the worse part of it is drawn down and draws the middle part with it: for it is

not lawful for the whole of it to be drawn down. This is its misfortune, not to remain in the noblest, where the soul remains which is not a part—and at that stage we too are not a part of it [1]—and grants to the whole of body to hold whatever it can hold of it, but abides itself untroubled, not thinking out its government or direction but setting things in order with a wonderful power by its contemplation of That which is before it. The more it is directed to that contemplation, the fairer and more powerful it is. It receives from There and gives to what comes after it, always illuminated and illuminating.

III. 1. 8

[Plotinus has just rejected the absolute determinism of the Stoics. For him the individual soul is to some extent the free and responsible cause of its own actions. In its higher life, out of the body, it is altogether free, but in so far as it is involved with the body it is subject to the necessity which controls the visible universe. And the degree of its freedom or involvement depends very much on itself.]

What other cause, then, is there which will intervene besides these and leave nothing uncaused, which will preserve order and sequence and allow us really to be something, and will not do away with prophecy and divination? We must introduce soul into reality as another originative principle, not only the Soul of the All but the individual soul along with it as an important cause, to weave all things together; for the individual soul too has not come into being like the rest of things from seed-principles,[2] but is primary in its causal action. When it is without body it is in fullest control of itself and free and outside the universal chain of causation: but when it is brought into body it is no longer altogether in control, as it forms part of an order with other members. Most of the sum of things in the circuit of the universe, among which it falls when it enters into this world, are directed by chance causes, so that some of its acts are caused by these other things, but sometimes it masters them and directs them according to its will. The better soul masters more, the worse less. The soul which surrenders at all to its union with the body is

compelled to feel passions of desire or anger, and is depressed by poverty, made conceited by riches, or tyrannical by power: but the other kind of soul, that which is good by nature, holds out in these very same circumstances, and changes them rather than is changed by them, so that it alters some of them and conforms to others without vice or weakness.

(*c*) *Descent into the Visible World*

IV. 8. 1

[Plotinus's own experience.]

Often I have woken up out of the body to myself and have entered into myself, going out from all other things. I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part. I have lived to the full the best life and come to identity with the Divine.[1] Set firm in It I have come to That Supreme Actuality, setting myself above all else in the realm of *Nous*. Then after that rest in the Divine, when I have come down from *Nous* to discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I ever came down, and how my soul has come to be in the body when it is what it has shown itself to be by itself, even when it is in the body.

IV. 3. 12-13

[The descent of souls is not complete; their highest part, their *Nous,* does not come down. It is brought about by an overwhelming natural impulse, a desire pre-ordained by universal law for embodiment in the body which it has assigned to them.]

The souls of men see their images as if in the mirror of Dionysus, and come down to that level with a leap from above: but even they are not cut off from their principle and their *Nous*. For they do not come down with their *Nous*: they have gone on ahead of it down to earth, but their tops are firmly set above in heaven. They have had to come down farther because their middle part is compelled to care for that to which they have gone on, which needs their care. . . .

The inescapable rule of right [which governs their descent] is thus set in a natural principle which compels each to go in its proper order to that to which it individually tends, the image of its original choice and disposition: each form of soul is close to that to which it has an internal disposition: there is no need of anyone to send it or bring it into body at a particular time, or into this or that particular body: when its moment comes to it, it descends and enters where it must as if of its own accord. Each has its own time, and when it comes, like a herald summoning it, the soul comes down and goes into the appropriate body; the process is like a stirring and carrying away by magic powers and mighty attractions. It is like the way in which the ordered development of the individual living thing comes to its fulfilment, stirring and producing everything in its time—sprouting of beard and horn, special impulses, new flowerings, the ordered growth of trees springing up at their appointed time.

The souls go neither of their own free will nor because they are sent; or at least their free will is not like deliberate choice but the leap of natural impulse, passionate natural desire of sexual union or an unreasoned stirring to noble deeds. Each special kind has its special destiny and moment, one now and one at another time. *Nous* which is before the universe has its destiny too, to remain There in all its greatness and send out: and the individual, which is subordinated to the universal, is sent according to law. For the universal bears heavily upon the particular, and the law does not derive from outside the strength for its accomplishment, but is given in those who are to be subject to it, and they bear it about with them. If the time comes, what it wills to happen is brought about by the beings themselves in whom it is present; they accomplish it themselves because they bear it about and it is strong by its firm establishment in them: it makes itself a sort of weight in them and brings about a longing, a birth-pang of desire to come there where the law within them tells them to come.

IV. 8. 5

[Solution of the difficulty caused by the apparent inconsistency in the teaching of Plato, who represents the descent of the soul sometimes as a voluntary fall and sometimes as caused by universal law and necessary for the good of the universe. Plotinus explains that both accounts are true, and the descent of the soul is both necessary and voluntary.]

So there is no inconsistency between the sowing to birth and the coming down for the perfection of the whole, and justice and the Cave, and necessity and free choice, if necessity includes free choice and being in the body, which is evil: nor is the teaching of Empedocles inconsistent with this, the flight from God and the wandering and the sin which is justly punished, nor that of Heraclitus, the finding refreshment in the flight,[2] nor altogether the willing descent which is also unwilling. For everything which goes to the worse does so unwillingly, yet, if it goes of its own motion, when it suffers that worse fate it is said to be justly punished for what it has done. When, however, it must act and suffer this way by an everlasting law of its nature, and its descent from That which is above it is to meet the approach and help the need of something else, if anyone said that a god sent it down, he would not be out of accord with the truth or with himself. For final results are referred to the principle from which they spring, even if there are many intervening stages. And since the "sin of the soul" can refer to two things, either to the cause of the descent or to doing evil when the soul has arrived here below, [the punishment of] the first is the very experience of descent, and of the lesser degree of the second the swift entrance into other bodies according to the judgment passed on its deserts—the word "judgment" indicates what happens by divine decree—but the excessive kind of wickedness is judged to deserve greater punishment in charge of chastising spirits.

So then the soul, though it is divine and comes from above, enters into body and, though it is a god of the lowest ranks, comes to this world by a spontaneous inclina-

tion, its own power and the setting in order of what comes after it being the cause of its descent. If it escapes quickly it takes no harm by acquiring a knowledge of evil and coming to know the nature of wickedness, and manifesting its powers, making apparent works and activities which if they had remained quiescent in the spiritual world would have been of no use because they would never have come into actuality; and the soul itself would not have known the powers it had if they had not come out and been revealed. Actuality everywhere reveals completely hidden potency, in a way obliterated and non-existent because it does not yet truly exist. As things are, everyone wonders at what is within because of the varied splendour of the outside and admires the greatness of soul because of these fine things which it does.

VI. 4. 16

[The descent of soul into body does not mean that a soul literally moves down into a body, but that a body comes to share in the life of a soul. This is an evil for the soul, because it means that its activity is no longer universal, but is confined to the sphere of its particular body: in the spiritual world a soul is still an individual, but with its individuality completely absorbed in universal activity.]

Since the participation [of body] in the nature of soul does not mean that soul departs from itself and comes to this world, but that bodily nature comes to be in soul and participates in it, it is obvious that the "coming" of which the ancient philosophers speak must refer to the presence there of bodily nature and its sharing in life and soul; "coming" is not at all to be taken in the sense of movement from one place to another; it means this kind of communion of body and soul, whatever its precise nature. So "descent" means coming to be in body, in the sense in which we speak of soul's being in body, that is, by giving body something of itself, not by coming to belong to it; and "departure" means that body has no kind of share in it. There is an order in the way in which the parts of the visible universe share in soul, and soul, since it occupies the lowest place in the intelligible world, often gives some-

thing of itself to body because it is closer to it by its power and less widely separated from it by the law which governs its nature. But this communion with body is an evil, and its deliverance from body a good. Why? Because, even if it does not belong to a particular body, when it is described as the soul of a particular body it has in some way become partial instead of universal. Its activity, though it still belongs to the whole, is no longer directed to the whole: it is as if someone who possessed a complete science concentrated his activity on one particular subject of investigation; though the good for him lies not in one particular part of his science but in the whole science which he possesses. So this soul, which belongs to the whole intelligible world and conceals its being a part in the whole, leaps out, one might say, from the whole to a part, and confines its activity to that part, as if fire which could burn everything was compelled to burn some small thing, although keeping all its power of burning. When the soul is altogether separate from body, it is individual without being individual, but when it becomes distinct from Universal Soul, not by movement in place but by becoming an individual in its activity, it is a part, not universal—yet it is still universal in a different way: but when it is not in charge of a particular body it is altogether universal, and a part then only potentially.

G

The Return of the Soul

(*a*) *The First Stages*

I. 6. 7-8

[The first stage in rising to the vision of the Good, the true Beauty, our Father, is to turn from the outward senses to the inner vision of the mind.]

Here the greatest, the ultimate contest is set before our souls; all our toil and trouble is for this, not to be left without a share in the best of visions. The man who attains this is blessed in seeing that blessed sight, and he who fails to attain it has failed utterly. A man has not failed if he fails to win beauty of colours or bodies, or power or office or kingship even, if he fails to win this and only this. For this he should give up the attainment of kingship and rule over all earth and sea and sky, if only by leaving and overlooking them he can turn to That and see.

But how shall we find the way? What method can we devise? How can one see the inconceivable Beauty Which stays within in the holy sanctuary and does not come out where the profane may see It? Let him who can follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before. When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to That which they image. For if a man runs to the image and wants to seize it as if it was the reality (like a beautiful reflection playing on the water, which some story somewhere, I think, said riddlingly a man wanted to catch and sank down into the stream and disappeared) then this man who clings to beautiful bodies and will not let them go, will, like the man in the story, but in soul, not in body, sink down into the dark depths where *Nous* has no delight, and stay blind in Hades, consorting

with shadows there and here. This would be truer advice, "Let us fly to our dear country." [1] Where then is our way of escape? How shall we put out to sea? (Odysseus, I think, speaks symbolically when he says he must fly from the witch Circe, or Calypso, and is not content to stay though he has delights of the eyes and lives among much beauty of sense.) Our country from which we came is There, our Father is There. How shall we travel to it, where is our way of escape? We cannot get there on foot; for our feet only carry us everywhere in this world, from one country to another. You must not get ready a carriage, either, or a boat. Let all these things go, and do not look. Shut your eyes and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use.

I. 3. 1-3

[The three types of men most fitted for the ascent and their different ways of rising to the level of *Nous.*]

First of all we must define the characteristics of these men: we will begin by describing the nature of the musician. We must consider him as easily moved and excited by beauty, but not quite capable of being moved by absolute beauty; he is, however, quick to respond to its images when he comes upon them, and just as nervous people react readily to noises, so does he to articulate sounds and the beauty in them; and he always avoids what is inharmonious and not a unity in songs and verses and seeks eagerly after what is rhythmical and shapely. So in leading him on these sounds and rhythms and forms perceived by the senses must be made the starting-point. He must be led and taught to make abstraction of the material element in them and come to the principles from which their proportions and ordering forces derive and to the beauty which is in these principles, and learn that this was what excited him, the intelligible harmony and the beauty in it, and beauty universal, not just a particular beauty, and he must have the doctrines of philosophy implanted in him; by these he must be brought to firm confidence in what he possesses without knowing it. We shall explain later what these doctrines are.

The lover (into whom the musician may turn, and then either stay at that stage or go on farther), has a kind of memory of beauty. But he cannot grasp it in its separateness, but he is overwhelmingly amazed and excited by visible beauties. So he must be taught not to cling round one body and be excited by that, but must be led by the course of reasoning to consider all bodies and shown the beauty that is the same in all of them, and that it is something other than the bodies and must be said to come from elsewhere, and that it is better manifested in other things, by showing him, for instance, the beauty of ways of life and of laws—this will accustom him to loveliness in things which are not bodies—and that there is beauty in arts and sciences and virtues.[2] Then all these beauties must be reduced to unity, and he must be shown their origin. But from virtues he can at once ascend to *Nous,* to Being: and There he must go the higher way.

The philosopher is naturally ready to respond and "winged," [3] we may say, and in no need of separation like the others. He has begun to move to the higher world, and is only at a loss for someone to show him the way. So he must be shown and set free, with his own good will, he who has long been free by nature. He must be given mathematical studies to train him in philosophical thought and accustom him to firm confidence in the existence of the immaterial—he will take to them easily, being naturally disposed to learning: he is by nature virtuous, and must be brought to perfect his virtue, and after his mathematical studies instructed in dialectic, and made a complete dialectician.

I. 3. 4-5

[A description of the Platonic method of dialectic, followed by an insistence that it is not a mere science of propositions, but brings the mind into immediate contact with the highest realities.]

What then is dialectic, which the other kinds of men as well as philosophers must be given? It is the science which can speak about everything in a reasoned and orderly way,

and say what it is and how it differs from other things and what it has in common with them; in what class each thing is and where it stands in that class, and if it really is what it is, and how many really existing things there are, and again how many non-existing things, different from real beings. It discusses good and not good, and the things that are classed under good and its opposite, and what is the eternal and what not eternal, with certain knowledge about everything and not mere opinion. It stops wandering about the world of sense and settles down in the world of *Nous,* and there it occupies itself, casting off falsehood and feeding the soul in what Plato calls "the plain of truth," using his method of division to distinguish the Forms, and to determine the essential nature of each thing, and to find the primary kinds, and weaving together by the intellect all that issues from these primary kinds, till it has traversed the whole intelligible world; then it resolves again the structure of that world into its parts, and comes back to its starting-point, and busies itself no more, but contemplates, having arrived at unity. It leaves what is called logical activity,[4] about premises and syllogisms, to another art, as it might leave knowing how to write. Some of the matter of logic it considers necessary, as a preliminary, but it makes itself the judge of this, as of everything else, and considers some of it useful and some superfluous, and belonging to the discipline which wants it.

But from where does this science derive its principles? *Nous* gives clear principles to any soul which can receive them: and then it combines and interweaves and distinguishes their consequences, till it arrives at perfect intelligence. For, Plato says, dialectic is "the purest part of intelligence and wisdom." So, since it is the most valuable of our mental abilities, it must be concerned with real being and what is most valuable; as wisdom it is concerned with real being, as intelligence with That which is beyond being. But surely philosophy is the most valuable thing? Are dialectic and philosophy the same? It is the valuable part of philosophy. For it must not be thought to be a tool the philosopher uses. It is not just bare theories and rules;

it deals with things and has real beings as a kind of material for its activity; it approaches them methodically and possesses real things along with its theories.

I. 2. 2-3

[The two kinds of virtue, "civic" and "purifying."]

The civic virtues, which we mentioned above, do genuinely set us in order and make us better by giving limit and measure to our desires, and putting measure into all our experience; and they abolish false opinions, by what is altogether better and by the fact of limitation, and by the exclusion of the unlimited and indefinite and the existence of the measured; and they are themselves limited and clearly defined. And by acting as a measure which forms the matter of the soul, they are made like the measure There and have a trace in them of the Best There. That which is altogether unmeasured is matter, and so altogether unlike: but in so far as it participates in form it becomes like That Good, Which is formless. Things which are near participate more. Soul is near and more akin to It than body; so it participates more, to the point of deceiving us into imagining that it is a god, and that all divinity is comprised in this likeness.

But since this mode of likeness indicates another, of a greater degree of virtue, we must speak of that other. In this discussion the real nature of civic virtue will become clear, and we shall also understand what is the virtue which is greater than it in its real nature, and that it is different from civic vitue. Plato, when he speaks of "likeness" as a "flight to God" [5] from existence here below, and does not call the virtues which come into play in civic life just "virtues," but adds the qualification "civic," and elsewhere calls all the virtues "purifications," makes clear that he postulates two kinds of virtues and does not regard the civic ones as producing likeness. What then do we mean when we call these other virtues "purifications," and how are we made really like by being purified? Since the soul is evil when it is thoroughly mixed with the body[6] and shares its experiences and has all the same opinions, it will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same

opinions but acts alone—this is intelligence and wisdom—and does not share the body's experiences—this is temperance—and is not afraid of departing from the body—this is courage—and is ruled by reason and *Nous,* without opposition—and this is justice. One would not be wrong in calling this state of the soul likeness to God, in which its activity is intellectual, and it is free in this way from bodily affections. For the Divine too is pure, and its activity is of such a kind that that which imitates it has wisdom. Well, then, why is the Divine itself not in this state? It has no states at all; states belong to the soul. The soul's intellectual activity is different: some of the realities There it thinks differently, and some it does not think at all. Another question then: is "intellectual activity" just a common term covering two different things? Not at all It is used primarily of the Divine, and secondarily of that which derives from it. As the spoken word (*logos*) is an imitation of that in the soul, so the word in the soul is an imitation of that in something else: as the uttered word, then, is broken up into parts as compared with that in the soul, so is that in the soul as compared with that before, which it interprets. And virtue belongs to the soul, but not to *Nous* or That which is beyond it.

I. 4. 14

[Man's well-being is an affair of the soul, not of soul and body together (as against Aristotle): too much bodily well-being endangers the well-being of soul, and the wise man will not want it, and if he has it will seek to reduce it.]

Man, and especially the good man, is not the composite of soul and body; separation from the body and despising of its so-called goods make this plain. It is absurd to maintain that well-being extends only as far as the living body, since well-being is the good life, which is concerned with soul and is an activity of soul, and not of all of it—for it is not an activity of the growth-soul, which would bring it into connexion with body. This state of well-being is certainly not the body's size or health, nor again does it consist in the excellence of the senses, for too much of

these advantages is liable to weigh man down and bring him to their level. There must be a sort of counterpoise on the other side, towards the best, to reduce the body and make it worse, so that it may be made clear that the real man is other than his outward parts. The man who belongs to this world may be handsome and tall and rich and the ruler of all mankind (since he is essentially of this region), and we ought not to envy him since he is cheated by things like these. The wise man will perhaps not have them at all, and if he has them will himself reduce them, if he cares for his true self. He will reduce and gradually extinguish his bodily advantages by neglect, and will put away authority and office. He will take care of his bodily health, but will not wish to be altogether without experience of illness, and still less of pain. If these do not come to him when he is young he will want to learn them, but when he is old he will not want either pains or pleasures to hinder him, or any earthly thing, pleasant or the reverse, so that he may not have to consider the body. When he finds himself in pain he will oppose to it the power which he has been given for the purpose; he will find no help to his well-being in pleasure and health and freedom from pain and trouble, nor will their opposites take it away or diminish it. For if one thing adds nothing to a state, how can its opposite take anything away?

I. 4. 16

[The good man's independence of and care for his body and bodily life.]

If anyone does not set the good man up on high in this world of *Nous,* but brings him down to chance events and fears their happening to him, he is not keeping his mind on the good man as we consider he must be, but assuming an ordinary man, a mixture of good and bad, and assigning to him a life which is also a mixture of good and bad and of a kind which cannot easily occur. Even if a person of this sort did exist, he would not be worth calling happy; he would have no greatness in him, either of the dignity of wisdom or the purity of good. The common life of body and soul cannot possibly be the life of well-being. Plato

was right in maintaining that the man who intends to be wise and happy must take his good from There, from above, and look to that Good and be made like it and live by it. He must hold on to this only as his goal, and change his other circumstances as he changes his dwelling-place, not because he derives any advantage in the point of well-being from one dwelling-place or another, but considering how the rest of his environment will be affected if he lives here or there. He must give to this bodily life as much as it needs and he can, but he is himself other than it and free to abandon it, and he will abandon it in nature's good time, and always plans for it with independent authority. So some of his activities will tend towards well-being; others will not be directed to the goal and will really not belong to him but to that which is joined to him, which he will care for and bear with as much as he can, like a musician with his lyre, as long as he can use it; if he cannot use it he will change to another, or give up using the lyre and abandon the activities directed to it. Then he will have something else to do which does not need the lyre, and will let it lie unregarded beside him while he sings without an instrument. Yet the instrument was not given to him at the beginning without good reason. He has used it often up till now.

II. 9. 16

[To despise the visible universe and to be insensitive to its beauty is proof that one has no real knowledge of the intelligible universe, the realm of *Nous*.]

No intelligent man would even inquire about this [about whether the visible universe is good, intelligent, and providentially directed], but only someone who is blind, without perception or intelligence and far from the sight of the universe of *Nous,* since he does not even see this universe here. For how could there be a musician who sees the melody in the realm of *Nous* and is not stirred when he hears the melody of sensible sounds? Or how could there be anyone skilled in geometry and the science of numbers who is not pleased when he sees right relation, proportion, and order with his bodily eyes? Of course, people do not

look at the same things in the same way; some, when they are looking at pictures, see the works of art with their eyes but recognize in them an imitation in the world of sense of the reality existing in *Nous,* and are excited by it and come to a recollection of the truth: this is the experience from which passionate loves arise. But if someone who sees beauty excellently represented in a face is carried to that higher world, will anyone be so sluggish in mind and so immovable that, when he sees all the beauties of the world of sense, all its good proportion and the mighty excellence of its order, and the splendour of form which the stars, for all their remoteness, make manifest, he will not be seized with reverence and think, "What wonders, and from what a source"? If he does not, he neither understands the world of sense nor sees that higher world.

II. 9. 18

[To revile the visible universe and deny its goodness, and to refuse to admit kinship with the cosmic Soul and the souls of the stars, is no way to attain spiritual freedom, which we gain by practising virtue while remaining in the body and fully accepting our embodied condition as long as it endures.]

But perhaps they [the Gnostics] will maintain that their teaching makes men escape right away from the body in their hatred of it, but ours holds the soul down to it. This is like two people living in the same fine house, one of whom criticizes the building and the architect but stays there all the same; the other does not criticize, but says the architect has built it with the utmost skill, and waits for the time to come when he will go away and not need a house any longer. The first might think he was wiser and readier to depart, because he knows how to say that the walls are built of soulless stones and timber and are far inferior to the true dwelling-place, and does not know that he is only distinguished by not being able to bear what he must—unless he is just making a pretence of discontent, and has a secret affection for the beauty of the stones. As long as we have bodies we must stay in our houses, which

have been built for us by a good sister soul which has great power to work without any toil or trouble. Or do these people think it right to call the lowest of men brothers, but refuse, in their Sibylline ravings,' to call the sun and the stars of heaven brothers and the Soul of the universe sister? It is not right to bind oneself in brotherhood to the bad, but only to those who have become good and are not bodies, but souls in bodies, able to live in them in such a way that they are very close to the dwelling of the Soul of the All in the body of the universe. This means no clashing with or paying attention to the pleasures and sights which rush upon us from outside, and not being disturbed by any hardship. The Soul of the All is not troubled; it has nothing that can trouble it. We, while we are here, can repel our troubles by virtue and make some of them become less by greatness of mind and others not even troubles because of our strength. As we draw near to the completely untroubled state we can imitate the Soul of the universe and the souls of the stars and, coming to a close likeness to them, hasten on to the same goal and have the same objects of contemplation, being ourselves, too, well prepared for them by nature and training (but they have their contemplation from the beginning). Even if the Gnostics do say that they alone can contemplate, that does not make them any more contemplative, nor does it if they claim to go out of the universe when they die while the stars do not, but adorn heaven for ever. They say this through complete lack of understanding of what "being outside" really means, and how "'Universal Soul governs all that is soulless." So one can be without affection for the body and pure, and despise death, and know what is better and pursue it, and not show ill-feeling against others who can and do always pursue it, as if they did not: there is no need to be like the people who think the stars do not move because their senses tell them they stand still. In the same way these people do not think that the natures of the stars see what is outside the material universe because they do not see that their souls come from outside.

I. 6. 2

[Beauty in material things is the result of the action on them of Form and *logos,* which unifies, and so makes beautiful, things of diverse parts and informs natural unities as a whole.]

We maintain that the things in this world are beautiful by participating in Form; for every shapeless thing which is naturally capable of receiving shape and form is ugly and outside the divine *logos* as long as it has no share in *logos* and form. This is absolute ugliness. But a thing is also ugly when it is not completely dominated by shape and *logos,* since its matter has not submitted to be completely shaped according to the form. The form, then, approaches and composes that which is to come into being from many parts into a single ordered whole; it brings it into a completed unity and makes it one by agreement of its parts; for since it is one itself that which is shaped by it must also be one as far as a thing can be which is composed of many parts. So beauty rests upon the material thing when it has been brought into unity, and gives itself to parts and wholes alike. When it comes upon something that is one and composed of like parts it gives the same gift to the whole; as sometimes art gives beauty to a whole house with its parts, and sometimes nature gives beauty to a single stone. So then the beautiful body comes into being by sharing in a *logos* which comes from the divine Forms.

V. 8. 1

[The artist imitates the beauty of the world of *Nous,* to which he has access directly, and not necessarily through the medium of nature.]

Since we maintain that the man who has attained to contemplation of the beauty of the world of *Nous,* and understood the beauty of the true *Nous,* will be able also to bring into his mind its Father, Who is beyond *Nous,* let us try to see and explain to ourselves how we can say things like this, how it is possible for anyone to contemplate the beauty of *Nous* and of that higher world. Let

us suppose, if you like, a couple of great lumps of stone lying side by side, one shapeless and untouched by art, the other which has been already mastered by art and turned into a statue of a god or of a man, of a Grace or one of the Muses if of a god, and if of a man not just of any man but of one whom art has made up out of every sort of beauty. The stone which has been brought to beauty of form by art will appear beautiful not because it is a stone (for then the other would be just as beautiful) but as a result of the form which art has put into it. Now the material did not have this form: it was in the man who thought it before it came into the stone. It was in the workman, not in so far as he had hands and eyes but because he had some art in him. So this beauty was in the art, and it was far better there; for the beauty in the art did not come into the stone: it stays in the art, and another comes from it into the stone which is derived from it and less than it. And even this does not stay pure and as it wants to be in the stone, but is only there as far as the stone has submitted to the art. If art makes its work like what it is and has (and it makes it beautiful according to the form of what it is making) it is itself more, and more truly, beautiful since it has the beauty of art which is greater and more beautiful than anything in the external object. For a thing is weaker than that which abides in unity in proportion as it expands in its advance towards matter. Everything which is extended departs from itself; if it is bodily strength it grows less strong, if heat, less hot, if power in general, less powerful, if beauty, less beautiful. Every original maker must be in itself stronger than that which it makes. It is not lack of music which makes a man musical, but music; and music in the world of sense is made by the music prior to that world.

But if anyone despises the arts because they produce their works by imitating nature, we must tell him, first, that natural things are imitations too: and then he must know that the arts do not simply imitate what they see; they go back to the *logoi* from which nature derives; and also that they do a great deal by themselves: since they possess beauty they make up what is defective in things.

Phidias did not make his Zeus from any model perceived by the senses; he understood what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible.[8]

VI. 7. 33

[The pursuit of beauty leads the soul eventually beyond form, shape, and proportion to the Formless Source of form, the One or Good.]

The Primary, the First, is without form; beauty There is the nature of good in *Nous*. The experience of lovers is evidence of this; as long as the lover is on the level of the impression made on his senses, he is not yet in love. It is only when he produces from this, by his own inward action, an impression which is not on his senses but in his undivided soul, that love is born. Then he seeks to look at the loved object in order to freshen that impression in his soul when it begins to fade. But if he understood that he must go on to that which has less form, it is that which he would desire. His first experience was love of a great light from a dim gleam of it. For shape is a trace of Something without shape, which produces shape, not shape It. It produces shape when matter comes to It. Matter is necessarily farthest away from It, since it has no shape derived from itself, not even of the lowest kind. So then, if it is not matter that is lovable, but the being which is informed by form, and the form in matter comes from soul, and soul is more form and more lovable, and *Nous* is more form than soul and more lovable still, we must assume that the Primary Nature of beauty is without form.

(*b*) *The Return to* Nous

V. 8. 11

[The return to *Nous* is a return to our true selves; in them we are so completely united to *Nous* that we no longer *see* it because we *are* it.]

If one of us is unable to see himself, and, when he is possessed by that god,[1] brings his contemplation to the point of vision, he presents himself to his own mind and

looks at a glorified image of himself; then he dismisses the image, beautiful though it is, and comes to unity with himself, and, making no more separation, is one and all together with that god silently present, and is with him as much as he wants to be and can be. If he returns again to being two, since he is pure he stays close to the god, so as to be present to him again in that other way if he turns again to him. This return to duality has the advantage that to begin with he sees himself, while he is different from the god; then he hastens inward and has everything, and leaves perception behind in his fear of being different, and is one There. If he wants to see by being different, he puts himself outside. While he is coming to know the god he must keep to an impression of him and form distinct ideas of him as he seeks him: but, as he learns in this way into what he is entering and comes to believe that it is into happiness, he must give himself up to what is within and become, instead of one who sees, an object of contemplation to another who sees him as he comes from the world of *Nous* and whom he illuminates with the Forms he brings thence in his mind. How then can anyone be in beauty without seeing it? If he sees it as something different he is not yet in beauty; he is in it most perfectly when he becomes it. If sight is of something external then we must not have sight, or only that which is identical with its object. This is a sort of intimate understanding and consciousness of a self which is careful not to depart from itself by wanting to see too much. We must consider this too, that the perception of evils has a more violent impact, but produces less knowledge as a result of the impact. Illness strikes our consciousness harder, but the quiet companionship of health gives us a better understanding of it. It presides over our being as something which belongs to it, and is one with us. Illness is alien and not our own, and therefore particularly obvious because it appears so very different from us. We have no consciousness of what is our own, and since we are like this we understand ourselves best when we have made our self-knowledge one with ourselves. There, then, when our knowledge is most perfectly conformed to *Nous*, we think we are ignorant

because we are waiting for the experience of sense-perception, which says it has not yet seen: and it certainly has not seen, and never will see things like these. It is sense-perception which disbelieves, but it is someone else who sees; and for him to disbelieve would be to disbelieve in his own existence: for he cannot after all put himself outside and make himself visible so as to look at himself with his bodily eyes.

VI. 5. 12

[The All, Real Being, or *Nous,* is infinite, not spatially, but because it is entirely without quantity, pure spirit. We, in our higher selves, are truly that All, but we do not understand it and so effectively become it till we radically simplify ourselves and turn away from all considerations of space and quantity and from our lower selves and their concerns in the material world.]

How then is it present? As one life; for life in a living thing does not only extend to a particular point beyond which it cannot advance to the whole, but is everywhere. If anyone again wants to know how, he should remember its power; it is not just so much, but if you go on dividing it mentally to infinity it has always the same power, fundamentally infinite; for it has no matter in itself to make it diminish along with the size of the body's bulk. If then you understand its ever-flowing spring of infinity, its nature, unwearying and unwearing and nowhere failing, boiling over with life in itself, wherever you look or on whatever you fix your gaze, you will not find it there. In fact, you will have the opposite experience; you will not be able to pass it and go beyond it nor bring it to a stop at a degree of smallness where it has nothing more to give because it has so diminished: but if you are able to go along with it, or, better, are in the All, you will seek nothing more; or else you will give up and turn aside to something else and fall, not seeing it when it is present because you are looking at something else. But if you are not looking for anything any more, how will you experience it? Because you have come to the All, and not stayed in a part of it, and

have not said even about yourself, "I am just so much." By rejecting the "so much" you have become all—yet you were all before; but because something else other than the All added itself to you, you became less by the addition; for the addition did not come from real being (you cannot add anything to that) but from that which is not. When you have become a particular person by the addition of non-being you are not all till you reject the non-being. You will increase yourself then by rejecting the rest, and by that rejection the All is with you. While you are with other things the All does not appear; it does not come in order to be present but you go away when it is absent. But you do not really go away from it (for it is there); you do not go anywhere, but remain present to it and turn your back on it. So the other gods too often appear to one when many are present, because only that one can see them. These are the gods who "in many forms travel through our cities," [2] but to that god the cities turn, and all the earth and sky; everywhere they abide with him and in him and hold from him being and the true beings, down to soul and life, which depend upon him and move to unity in his infinity without size.

(*c*) *The Ascent to Union with the One*

V. 3. 17

[The One transcends even *Nous,* and our soul is not satisfied till it reaches It; the attainment described as an illumination.]

What then is better than this wisest life, without fault or mistake, and than *Nous* which contains everything, than universal life and universal *Nous?* If we say, "That which made them," how did it make them? If nothing better appears, our train of thought will not go on to something else, but will stop at *Nous.* But there are many reasons for going higher, particularly the fact that the self-sufficiency of *Nous* which results from its being composed of all things is something which comes to it from outside; each of the things of which it is composed is obviously

insufficient; and because each of them participates in the same One, *Nous* too participates in One and is not the One Itself. What then is That in which it participates, Which makes it exist and all things along with it? If It makes each individual thing exist, and it is by the presence of the One that the multitude of individual things in *Nous,* and *Nous* itself, is self-sufficient, it is clear that It, since It is the Cause of being and self-sufficiency, is not being but beyond it and beyond self-sufficiency.

Is that enough? Can we end the discussion by saying this? No, my soul is still in even stronger labour; perhaps she has still something which she must bring forth; she is filled with birth-pangs in her eager longing for the One. But we must sing another charm to her, if we can find one anywhere to allay her pangs. Perhaps there might be one in what we have said already, if we sang it over and over again. What other new charm can we find? The soul runs over all truths, and all the same shuns the truths we know if someone tries to express them in words and discursive thought: for discursive thought, in order to express anything, has to consider one thing after another; this is the method of description; but how can one describe the Absolutely Simple? It is enough if the intellect comes into contact with It: but when it has done so, while the contact lasts it is absolutely impossible, nor has it time, to speak; reasoning about It comes afterwards. One must believe one has seen, when the soul suddenly takes light; for this light is from Him, and He is it. We must think that He is present, when, like another god whom someone called to his house, He comes and brings light to us; for if He had not come, He would not have brought the light. So the soul which does not see Him is without light: but when it is enlightened it has what it sought, and this is the soul's true end, to touch that Light and see It by Itself, not by another light, by Itself, Which gives it sight as well. It must see That Light by which it is enlightened; for we do not see the sun by another light than his own. How then can this happen? Take away everything!

VI. 7. 34–36

[The happy state of the soul which enjoys the vision of the Good; how *Nous,* in itself and in the soul, transcends its normal knowing to reach that vision.]

We shall no longer be surprised if we find that the Object which causes these tremendous longings is altogether free from even intelligible shape; for the soul too, when it conceives an intense desire for It, puts away all the shape it has and anything intelligible there is in it. For no one who possesses anything else and is actively concerned with it can see the Good or be conformed to Him. The soul must not keep by it good or evil or anything else, that it may alone receive Him, the Only One. When the soul has good fortune with Him and He comes to it, or rather when His presence becomes manifest, when it turns away from the things present to it and prepares itself, making itself as beautiful as possible, and comes to likeness with Him (those who practise this preparation and adorning know clearly what they are); then it sees Him suddenly appearing in itself (for there is nothing between, nor are they still two, but both are one; while He is present, you could not distinguish them; lovers and those they love here imitate this state in their longing to unite); it is not conscious of being in its body any more, nor does it call itself anything else, man or living being, or being, or all; to contemplate these things does not suit its present state; it has no time for them and does not want them; it seeks the Good and meets It when It is present and looks at It instead of itself; and it has no time to see who it is who looks. There it would not exchange anything in the world for This, not even if you gave it the mastery over the whole heaven, since there is nothing better, no greater good; for it cannot go higher, and everything else, however exalted, only belongs to it when it comes down. So then it can judge rightly and know that This is what it desired, and say with certainty that nothing is better than This; for there is no deceit There; where could it find anything truer than the Truth? It is That which it speaks

of, and it speaks of It afterwards, silently and happily and without making any mistake about its happiness. It does not speak when its bodily senses are tickled but when it becomes again That which it was before, when it was happy.[1] As for all the other things in which it took delight before, position, power, wealth, beauty, knowledge, it despises them all and says so, and it would not say so if it had not found better things than these. It is not afraid of any misfortune while it is with This and while it has the full vision; if everything else belonging to it is destroyed, it is with its full approval, so that it may be only with This; to so great happiness has it attained.

It is so disposed then that it thinks little of the activity of *Nous,* which it welcomed at other times, because the activity of *Nous* is a kind of movement, and it does not want to move; for it says that He Whom it sees does not move either. All the same, it does become *Nous* and contemplates by being intellectualized and entering into the intelligible region; when it has entered there and is surrounded by the intelligible it thinks; but when it sees Him it at once puts away everything. It is as if someone went into a richly decorated house and looked at and admired all the beauties of its interior, before he saw the master of the house; but when he saw him, not the same kind of thing as a statue but requiring real contemplation, he would abandon the decorations and look only at him in future; and then, looking at him and not taking his eyes off him, by the continuity of his gaze he would no longer see a sight but blend his vision with its object, so that what he saw before became sight in him, and he forgot all other objects. The image would give a better comparison if it was not a man who presented himself to the visitor contemplating the beauties of the house, but a god, and one who did not appear to the eyes but filled the soul of the beholder.

Nous has one power for thinking, by which it looks at its own contents, and one by which it sees That Which is above it by a kind of intuitive reception, by which it first simply saw and afterwards, as it saw, acquired intellect, and is one. The first is the contemplation of *Nous* in its

right mind, the second that of *Nous* in love. When it goes out of its mind, being drunk with the nectar, it falls in love and is simplified into a happy fullness; and drunkenness like this is better for it than sobriety. But is its vision partial, now of one thing and now of another? No; the course of the exposition presents these visions as [successive] happenings, but *Nous* always has thought and always has this state which is not thought but looking at Him in a different way.[2] In seeing Him it possesses the things which it produces and is conscious at the same time both of their production and their presence within it. Seeing them is what is called thinking, but it sees Him at the same time by the power which makes it able to think.

The soul sees Him by a kind of blurring together the *Nous* abiding in it and making it disappear, or rather its *Nous* sees first, and the contemplation passes to it and the two become one. The Good is spread out upon them and united with the combination of both, and runs over the two and rests upon them, uniting them and giving them a blessed sense and sight; It raises them so high that they are not in place, nor in anything else, though they are things whose nature is to be one in another; for He is not anywhere; the intelligible place is in Him, and He is not in any other. So the soul does not move then, because the Good does not; and it is not soul, because the Good does not live, but is above life; nor is it *Nous,* because the Good does not think; for the soul must be like It. (It does not think, because It is not an object of thought.)

Everything else is clear, and we have said something about the point which follows. But all the same we ought to say a little about it here too, beginning from the point we have reached, and going on by a process of reasoning. The greatest thing is knowledge of or contact with the Good. Plato says that it "is the greatest study," [3] meaning by "study" not the actual vision but learning something about It beforehand. We learn about It by comparisons and negations and knowledge of the things which proceed from It and intellectual progress by ascending degrees; but we advance towards It by purifications and virtues and adornings of the soul and by gaining a foothold in the

world of *Nous* and settling ourselves firmly There and feasting on its contents; anyone who attains to this at once contemplates himself and everything else and is the object of his contemplation; he becomes real being and *Nous* and the Perfect Living Creature and does not look at it any more from outside. When he becomes this he is near; the Good is next above him, close to him, already shining over the whole intelligible world. Then letting all study go, led by his instruction to *Nous* and firmly established in beauty, he raises his thought to that in which he is, but is carried out of it by the very surge of the wave of *Nous* and, lifted high by its swell, suddenly sees without knowing how; the Sight fills his eyes with light but does not make him see something else by it, but the Light is That Which he sees. There is not in It one thing which is seen and another which is Its light, or *Nous* and that which it thinks, but a Radiance which produces these at a later stage and lets them exist beside it. The Good is a Radiance which simply produces *Nous* without extinguishing Itself in the production. The Radiance remains, and *Nous* comes to be by reason of the Good's existence.

VI. 8. 15

[We know that the One is altogether outside the realm of chance because we are aware of something in ourselves which transcends chance by the power of Its light; and when we attain to that and become it and put away all else we are more than free, more than masters of ourselves.]

When we say that He does not receive anything into Himself and that nothing else receives Him, in this way too we are putting Him outside the class of beings which are what they are by chance, not only by setting Him alone and pure of everything, but for another reason: we may possibly ourselves perceive in ourselves a nature of this kind, which has none of the other things which are attached to us and by reason of which we are subject to the accidents of chance. Everything else which we have is in servitude, and exposed to chance, and came to us by chance. By this alone we have effective power over our-

selves and independence, by the act of a light which is like the Good, and good itself, greater than the activity of *Nous,* which it transcends in its own right. When we ascend to this and become this alone and put away everything else, what can we say about it except that we are more than free, more than independent? Who then could bind us to chance or hazard or accident, when we have come to be the true Life, or to be in It, the Life which has nothing else but is Itself alone?

VI. 9. 11

[The experience of the mystic union described.]

This is what the command given in those mysteries intends to proclaim, "Do not reveal to the uninitiated." Because the Divine is not to be revealed it forbids us to declare It to anyone else who has not himself had the good fortune to see. Since there were not two, but the seer himself was one with the Seen (for It was not really seen, but united to him), if he remembers who he became when he was united to That, he will have Its image in himself. He was one himself then, with no distinction in him either in relation to himself or anything else; for there was no movement in him, and he had no emotion, no desire for anything else when he had made the ascent, no reason or thought; his own self was not there for him, if we should say even this. He was as if carried away or possessed by a god, in a quiet solitude, in the stillness of his being turning away to nothing and not busy about himself, altogether at rest and having become a kind of rest. He did not belong to the realm of beauties, but had already passed beyond Beauty and gone higher than the choir of the virtues, like a man who enters into the sanctuary and leaves behind the statues in the outer shrine.[4] They are the first things he looks at when he comes out of the sanctuary, after his contemplation within and his converse There, not with a statue or image but with the Divine Itself; they are secondary objects of contemplation. That other, perhaps, was not a contemplation but another kind of seeing, a being out of oneself, a simplifying, a self-surrender, a pressing towards contact, a rest, a sustained thought di-

rected to perfect conformity, if it was a real contemplation of That Which was in the sanctuary: if one does not look in this way one finds nothing. These are only images, by which the wise among the soothsayers express in riddles how That God is seen. A wise priest reads the riddle and makes the contemplation of the sanctuary real by entering it. Even if one has not been There, and thinks of the sanctuary as something invisible, the Source and Principle, one will know that one sees principle by principle and that like is united with like, and will not neglect any of the divine properties which the soul can have. Before the vision one seeks the rest from the vision; and the rest, for him who has gone higher than all, is That Which is before all. Soul is not of a nature to arrive at absolute non-existence. When it goes down it comes to evil, and so to non-existence, but not to absolute non-existence; and when it travels the opposite way it comes, not to something else, but to itself; and so when it is not in anything else it is in nothing but itself. But when it is in itself alone and not in being, it is in That; for one becomes oneself not being but beyond being by that intercourse. So if one sees that one's self has become this, one has it as a likeness of the Divine; and if one goes on from it, as image to original, one reaches the end of one's journey. And when a man falls from the vision, he wakes again the virtue in himself and considers himself in all his order and beauty, and is lightened and rises through virtue to *Nous* and through wisdom to the Divine. This is the life of gods and divine and blessed men, deliverance from the things of this world, a life which takes no delight in the things of this world, escape in solitude to the Solitary.

Notes

A. PORPHYRY'S *LIFE*

1. (1) Amelius Gentilianus from Etruria was one of Plotinus's disciples and, as Porphyry's *Life* makes clear, the leading member of the school, in which he seems to have acted as Plotinus's chief assistant. He was extremely pious, with, apparently, a leaning towards Oriental religions and philosophies, and a diffuse and voluminous writer. He compiled, and eventually published, a hundred volumes of notes taken at Plotinus's lectures, of which nothing survives. For a sketch of his character and activities see P. Henry, *Plotin et L'Occident*, pp. 3-5.
2. (1) A portrait was in fact made by Carterius, a friend of Amelius, without the knowledge of Plotinus, but no certain copy of it has survived: cp. Introduction I, p. 12.
3. (10) This famous remark was obviously intended first and foremost to put Amelius firmly in his place and stop him bothering the Master with his well-intentioned pious fuss, and too much should not be built on it. If we are to connect it with anything in the *Enneads*, it should be with passages like V. 5. 8 (D (*d*), p. 66) or V. 3. 17 (G (*c*), p. 141) where Plotinus speaks of the sudden "coming" of the One to the soul, which must wait patiently for Him and not go chasing after Him: this sudden coming, appearance, or illumination of the supreme God is a theme which appears already in the Platonists of the 2nd century, cp. Apuleius, *De Deo Socratis*, III. 124; St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* IV.
4. (14) On the Stoic and Peripatetic elements in Plotinus see Introduction II, pp. 18-19, 21.
5. (14) Of these authors, Severus, Gaius, and Atticus were learned Middle Platonists of the 2nd century A.D. Gaius was the leader of the important group, much influenced by Aristotle and the Stoics, which is best represented for us by Albinus and an anonymous commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*. Atticus is the chief representative of the anti-Aristotelian group among the Middle Platonists. Cronius and Numenius are usually mentioned together and classed as Neo-Pythagoreans, though the boundary between Platonists and Pythagoreans was ill defined and Porphyry here quite naturally groups them with the Platonists. Numenius (late 2nd century) was one of the most important philosophers of the generation before Plotinus, who was sometimes accused of plagiarizing his thought (*Life*, ch. 17): there are certainly striking likenesses between the two, though also important differences. On Middle Platonism and Neo-Pythagoreanism in general see Introduction II, p. 16.

6. (14) Alexander of Aphrodisias (head of the Peripatetic school at Athens at the beginning of the 3rd century) was the greatest of the ancient commentators on Aristotle. Aspasius and Adrastus were also Aristotelian commentators, of the 2nd century.
7. (23) The last part of Diotima's speech in the *Banquet* (210-212a), about the ascent from bodily to intelligible beauty is one of the great Platonic texts which Plotinus frequently refers to the ascent of the mind to God.
8. (23) The quotation is from the oracle of Apollo about Plotinus, delivered after his death to Amelius, which Porphyry gives in full in the preceding chapter.

B. ON THE THREE HYPOSTASES

1. (V. 1. 11.) Plotinus is fond of this image of the centre and the circle to express the immanent otherness of the One and the intimate dependence on Him of the multiplicity of being: cp. III. 8. 8.
2. (V. 2. 1.) This passage states clearly what is apparent from Plotinus's whole account of the Lower Soul or Nature (the principle of growth), that it is in fact a fourth hypostasis or level of being. He might possibly have squared this with his denial of more than three Principles "in the intelligible realm" (cp. II. 9. 1.) by pointing out that Nature does not really belong to that realm, but is entirely concerned with the material world. But his reason for refusing to extend the list of hypostases beyond Soul is probably faithfulness to the Platonic tradition, according to which Soul is the intermediary between the intelligible and sensible worlds and the exclusive principle of life and movement; this would make it natural for him to think of any principle active in the sense-world as a species or subdivision of soul rather than as a distinct hypostasis in its own right, and he does in fact usually speak of Nature in this way: in any case it matters little to him for, as he goes on to say "nothing is separated": there is no clear line of demarcation between the descending stages of derived being.

C. THE ONE OR GOOD

1. (VI. 8. 13.) The treatise VI. 8 (*On Free Will and the Will of the One*) is that in which Plotinus goes furthest in making positive statements about the One. There is no real inconsistency between it and his normal doctrine. He makes clear in this passage that he regards such positive language as inadequate; there is plenty of his usual sort of "negative theology" in the treatise; and equally positive statements about the One can be found elsewhere, as these selections show. But there is a difference of emphasis, which is probably to be explained by the fact that in

this treatise Plotinus is attacking a particular set of opponents, who maintained (ch. 7) "that the nature of the Good is what it is by chance, and is not in control of being what it is, since it does not derive what it is from itself, and it is not free; acting or not acting is not in its own power, since it is compelled to act or not to act." Who these opponents were is not certain. Bréhier in his introduction to the treatise makes the very probable suggestion that they were Gnostics. In answering them Plotinus insists very strongly on the positive side of the transcendence of the One, Whom he presents as self-caused and absolutely free, with a complete spontaneity which has nothing of chance or arbitrariness in it.

2. (VI. 9. 1.) This list of unities derives from a Stoic source, perhaps from Posidonius: cp. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* II, 366.
3. (VI. 9. 3.) Here Plotinus, as often, is applying to the One the arguments of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* (cp. 139b, 141d), following an interpretation of the dialogue which had for some time been current among Platonists but is almost certainly completely mistaken.
4. (V. 5. 6.) The word here translated "essence" is *ousia,* the Aristotelian term for the substantial form, the principle which gives a thing its particular, definite being, which makes it *this* thing and not anything else. As what follows makes clear, Plotinus will only apply the term "being" in its strict and proper sense to essences (Matter for him is non-being). Plotinus recognizes, as Plato probably did not, an Absolute Being, Being without further qualification: but this is *Nous* as the totality of real beings, i.e. of Forms or essences. The account given by the mediaeval Christian philosophers of the Infinite Being of God is closer to what Plotinus says about the One than to what he says about Being, i.e. *Nous,* though there are elements in it derived from both descriptions.
5. (VI. 9. 6.) The "things which come after the One" are the Forms in *Nous.* This conception of an infinity of power which has nothing to do with numerical infinity or unbounded quantitative extension, is an important one in the thought of Plotinus. Vague, indefinite endlessness is abhorrent to him as to all Greek philosophers, and when he asserts infinity of the One, or, in a certain sense, of *Nous,* he is careful to make clear that this is not at all what he means.
6. (VI. 8. 14-15.) The insistence that there is nothing casual, ac- in this and the following extract is directed against the thesis of the (probably Gnostic) opponents with whom Plotinus is arguing in this treatise: see note 1 of this section.
7. (V. 5. 12.) The Beautiful or Beauty in this passage is the form or Idea of Beauty in the realm of *Nous.* The Good has His own beauty beyond form; cp. VI. 7. 33 (G (*a*), p. 138);

but Plotinus normally speaks of beauty as belonging to *Nous,* and the realities of its world.

D. NOUS

(*a*) *In its Relation to the One*

1. (V. 1. 6.) This image is repeated in VI. 9. 11 (G (*c*), p. 147.) It is probably a reference to the rituals of the mystery-religions, and perhaps in particular to the cult of Isis (though the ordinary public Greek or Roman temple had its crowd of statues outside and its inner shrine, containing the image of the god himself, where worshippers often genuinely felt that the god was present in person). But whether the reference is to mystery-cults or public ones, the symbol is only a symbol, and does not imply any assertion of the religious value of external cult: cp. F. Cumont, *Lux Perpetua,* pp. 359-360.
2. (V. 1. 6.) That the product is always less than the producer is one of the axioms of Plotinus's philosophy.
3. (VI. 7. 22.) In this and what follows Plotinus is inspired by Plato's famous symbolic description of how the soul of the lover grows its wings again, *Phaedrus,* 251.
4. (VI. 7. 22.) This insistence that it is life which makes things beautiful rather than good proportions is a most important and significant departure from the classical Greek aesthetic which found beauty in measure and proportion, with the formulation of which Plato had a great deal to do. Plotinus's other important departure from Plato in his thought about art is his elevation of the status of the artist, whom he puts directly in touch with the intelligible world instead of making him a mere copier of the things of sense: cp. V. 8. 1 (G (*a*), p. 136) and G (*a*), n. 8, p. 156.

(*b*) *As World of Forms—Intellect*

1. (V. 9. 6.) For the meaning of *logos* see Introduction III, p. 32.
2. (V. 1. 4.) These five categories or kinds of being, which are discussed in the next two extracts, are taken from the discussion in Plato, *Sophist,* 248a-255e (though it is unlikely that Plotinus's interpretation represents anything like Plato's real thought). In the long treatise *On the Kinds of Being,* divided by Porphyry into three (VI. 1-3) Plotinus drastically criticizes the categories of Aristotle and the Stoics, and insists that these five Platonic categories are alone adequate for the purpose of analysing the realities of the world of *Nous.*

E. SOUL

(*a*) *In its Relationship to* Nous

1. (V. 3. 3-4.) The doctrine of the very late treatise, from which this and the next two extracts are taken, seems to represent a

re-thinking and an attempt to arrive at greater precision about the relationship between soul and *Nous*. Elsewhere Plotinus says without qualification that we at our highest are, and remain eternally, *Nous:* cp. IV. 3. 5 (F (*a*), p. 113) and IV. 3. 12 (F (*c*), p. 121.)

(*b*) *In its Activity in the Sense-world*

1. (IV. 3. 9.) The general Platonic tradition, from Xenocrates, Plato's second successor, to the time of Plotinus (and after, for the great majority of pagan Platonists) was that Plato in the *Timaeus,* in his account of the making of the world by the Demiurge, had not meant to teach that the material world really had a beginning in time, and that in fact it had no such beginning and was everlasting. Only Plutarch and Atticus (see A, n. 5, p. 149) maintained that Plato's account was to be accepted literally as implying a beginning in time.
2. (II. 3. 17.) This secondary soul is the lower, immanent life-principle which Plotinus elsewhere calls Nature: cp. Introduction III, p. 35 and the next extracts.
3. (II. 3. 17.) *Nous* is here identified with the Demiurge, the Divine Craftsman who makes the world in the *Timaeus.*
4. (III. 8. 5.) The reference is to Plato, *Phaedrus,* 247e.
5. (V. 8. 7.) This remark is in contradiction to Plotinus's normal doctrine that matter is absolute formlessness and so absolute evil (see the section on *Matter and Evil* below). Proclus held that matter was directly caused by the One and so good, not evil or the principle of evil: but he did not regard it as any sort of form. A doctrine, which looks like a development of that suggested here, that matter is produced by the meeting of purely spiritual and intelligible qualities or principles, and that there is no material substratum apart from these qualities appears in the Cappadocian Fathers, St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa: cp. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hom opificio* 44, 213C Migne.
6. (IV. 4. 33.) cp. the application of the same image to the moral order in III 2. 17 (below, p. 104.)
7. (IV. 4. 40.) The reference is to the two cosmic principles of the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles; but for Plotinus they are not two separate and opposed principles but two ways of looking at one and the same activity of Soul in the universe.
8. (III. 2. 2.) In the treatise *On Providence* (divided by Porphyry, III. 2 and 3) the part usually played by Universal Soul in the universe is taken over by a *Logos* which proceeds from *Nous* and *Soul* and represents *Nous* in the visible world.
9. (III. 2. 9.) This looks as if it might be directed against the Christian doctrine of Redemption. If so, it is the only reference which I have detected to orthodox Christianity in the *Enneads.*
10. (III. 2. 17.) The image of the drama of life is a very favour-

ite one with the Stoics: cp. Marcus Aurelius XII. 36. But Plotinus transforms it in a Platonic sense, and thereby safeguards moral responsibility, by insisting on the pre-existence of the actors (i.e. human souls).

11. (III. 7. 11.) This is a reference to Plato's description of time as "a moving image of eternity," *Timaeus,* 37d, on which the whole of Plotinus's description of time is a very original commentary.

12. (III. 6. 7.) Belief in the void, absolutely empty space, was confined in antiquity to the Atomists and Epicureans. Platonists, Aristotelians, and Stoics agreed in rejecting it.

13. (I. 8. 7.) The texts on which Plotinus is commenting here are
   (i) *Theaetetus,* 176a. "Evils, Theodorus, can never be done away with, for the good must always have its contrary; nor have they any place in the divine world; but they must needs haunt this region of our mortal nature. That is why we should make all speed to take flight from this world to the other; and that means becoming like the divine so far as we can, and that again is to become righteous with the help of wisdom."
   (ii) *Timaeus,* 47e–48a. "For the generation of this universe was a mixed result of the combination of Necessity and Reason."
   (iii) *Timaeus,* 41b. (From the address of the Demiurge to the star-gods whom he has just made) "Therefore, though you, having come into being, are not immortal nor indissoluble altogether, nevertheless you shall not be dissolved nor taste of death, finding my will a bond yet stronger and more sovereign than those wherewith you were bound together when you came to be."

The passages are quoted in Cornford's translation.

F. OUR SELVES

(*a*) *Their Foundation in* Nous *and Relationship to Universal Soul*

1. (IV. 3. 4.) This is probably a reference to the conception of the "astral body," which was generally adopted by the later Neo-Platonists, is based on ideas of Plato and Aristotle, and probably took shape in the period of the early Empire: cp. E. R. Dodds, Appendix II to *Proclus, The Elements of Theology* (Oxford, 1933).

(*b*) *Higher and Lower Self*

1. (II. 9. 2.) We are "not a part," because according to Plotinus's constant teaching, in the higher world of *Nous,* or soul perfectly conformed to and abiding in *Nous,* the particular being, while retaining its distinct individuality, *is* in a real sense the whole.

2. (III. 1. 8.) These "seed-principles" are the *logoi spermatikoi*

of the Stoics, the "forming-forces" in the seed which are the principles of growth and development of individual things: in the system of Plotinus they are *logoi* in his sense, expressions of a higher principle on a lower level of being.

(*c*) *Descent into the Visible World*

1. (IV. 8. 1.) The Divine here is *Nous:* the next sentence probably refers to the ascent in *Nous* to union with the One. As always in Plotinus, there are two stages which must be clearly distinguished.
2. (IV. 8. 5.) All these passages are quoted and discussed more fully in ch. 1 of this same treatise. The "sowing to birth" is from *Timaeus,* 42d, the Cave the famous symbol of *Republic,* VII, 514ff. The Heraclitus fragment (probably really quite irrelevant to the present discussion, but we do not know its precise context) is printed by Diels, 22B, 84a. The Empedocles reference is to the poem *Purifications,* of which the fragments are printed at Diels, 31B, 112ff.: this reference is to fr. 115. It is really relevant here, as the poem expounds the doctrine of the fall, wandering through successive incarnations and return of the soul.

G. THE RETURN OF THE SOUL

(*a*) *The First Stages*

1. (I. 6. 8.) The quotation is from *Iliad,* II. 140 (of course from a quite irrelevant context). But Plotinus's mind turns immediately to reminiscences of *Odyssey,* 9. 29ff, and 10. 483–484, where Odysseus tells Alcinous how Calypso and Circe had loved him and tried to detain him on his journey home. Odysseus became in the late-Hellenistic world, for Christians as well as pagans, the type of the soul journeying to its true home and overcoming all difficulties and temptations on the way.
2. (I. 3. 2.) This description of the ascent of the lover follows closely that given by Plato in the *Banquet,* 210b ff.
3. (I. 3. 3.) Again a reference to the great myth of the *Phaedrus,* 246 c1.
4. (I. 3. 4.) This of course is Aristotle's logic, which Plotinus treats with much less respect than do Porphyry and the later Neo-Platonists (though they too maintain the distinction between logic, the preliminary study, and dialectic, the highest part of philosophy).
5. (I. 2. 3.) The reference is to the passage of the *Theaetetus* quoted above (E (*b*), n. 13, p. 154). Plato applies the epithet "civic" to virtues at *Republic,* IV, 430c, but without any implication of the sort of distinction made here. They are called "purifications" at *Phaedo,* 69 b–c.
6. (I. 2. 3.) The phrase "mixed with the body," with the same dualistic implication, is used at *Phaedo,* 66b.

7. (II. 9. 18.) The phrase translated "Sibylline ravings" is one used by Heraclitus in speaking of the Sibyl (Diels, 22B. 92), *stomati mainomenoi.*

8. (V. 8. 1.) This very important departure from Plato's view of the artist is expounded in the *Republic,* where he is treated as a mere copyist of nature, goes back at least to the age of Cicero, who speaks in the same way of Phidias having no visible model for his Zeus or Athena, but imitating an ideal beauty perceived by the mind (*Orator,* II, 8–9: cp. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius,* VI. 19. 2.) Cicero, of course, must owe the idea to some Greek source, from which Philostratus and Plotinus also ultimately derive it.

(*b*) *The Return to* Nous

1. (V. 8. 11.) *Nous* in this and the next extract is called "the god"; it is the being to which for Plotinus the name *theós* is most properly applied. He very occasionally uses the word of the One, but, like all human terms, it is inadequate to describe Him. See Introduction III, p. 28.

2. (VI. 5. 12.) A quotation from the *Odyssey,* 17. 486.

(*c*) *The Ascent to Union with the One*

1. (VI. 7. 34.) Plotinus's mind slides naturally, but illogically, from the state after the union in which the soul may attempt to speak of its experience, to the return to union itself, in which of course, the soul cannot speak at all.

2. (VI. 7. 35.) Man in his normal state is not conscious of this continual presence of the Good to the *Nous* in him: cp. V. 5. 12 (C, p. 62).

3. (VI. 7. 36.) *Republic,* VI, 504e. The phrase introduces the great discussion of the Good, in which It is compared to the sun, which is the foundation of the theology of Plotinus.

4. (VI. 9. 11.) See note on V. 1. 6 (D (*a*), p. 152).

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